The fairground neon of the human world buzzed with a chaotic energy that usually made Riva sneer, but today, he had a specific goal. Behind him, Gura was already three churros deep, and Regina was vibrating with bratty impatience.

"This had better be worth the travel, Riva," Regina snapped, crossing her arms over her red-and-black dress. "If this 'Dragon’s Breath' coaster isn't terrifying enough to make a Glitter Warrior weep, I’m going to blast the whole pier into the ocean."

"Patience, Princess," Riva purred, adjusting his top hat. "It’s the tallest drop in the hemisphere. The sheer terror of the humans in line is already a gourmet meal of negative energy."

"I just want to know if they have a snack bar at the top," Gura mumbled, licking cinnamon sugar off his fingers.

They bypassed the line with a simple flick of Riva’s wrist, the humans’ eyes glazing over as the three villains stepped into the front row of the coaster. Riva and Gura sat shoulder-to-shoulder in the first car, their bulky frames pressing together, while Regina claimed the seat behind them, gripping the safety bar like a throne.

"Hold on tight, Gura," Riva murmured, his voice dropping an octave as the car began its slow, clicking ascent. "I wouldn't want you falling out before we see the view."

Gura gave a toothy grin, his hand overlapping Riva’s on the bar. "If I fall, I’m taking you with me. You’re the only one who knows where the good steakhouse is."

The coaster reached the apex. For a second, the world was silent. They were suspended between the clouds and the glittering sea.

"Look at them," Regina whispered from behind, her eyes gleaming. "They look like ants. I want to crush—"

WHOOSH.

The drop was a vertical plunge into darkness. Regina let out a high-pitched, delighted cackle that sounded more like a war cry. Gura’s stomach did a somersault that had nothing to do with the churros, and he instinctively leaned his weight into Riva.

As the coaster whipped through a double-corkscrew, Riva didn't flinch. Instead, he watched Gura out of the corner of his eye—the way the brute’s hair flew back, the rare look of genuine, mindless joy on his face. In the chaos of the wind and the screams of the humans in the back, Riva reached over and squeezed Gura’s hand.

"Not bad, eh?" Riva shouted over the roar of the tracks.

"Needs more loops!" Gura roared back, though he didn't pull his hand away.

The ride slammed to a halt in a cloud of brake-smoke. Regina hopped out instantly, her hair surprisingly perfect. "Again!" she demanded, pointing a finger at the terrified ride operator. "And this time, make it go fast enough to break the sound barrier!"

Riva stepped out of the car, offering a hand to Gura. "You heard the Princess, Gura. Back to the top?"

Gura took the hand, pulling himself up and nearly knocking Riva over in the process. "Only if we get more churros after. I work better on a full stomach."

Riva straightened his tie, a small, rare smirk playing on his lips. "Anything for you, my gluttonous friend. Anything for you."

&

The Splendorius palace was usually filled with the sounds of Regina’s demands or Gura’s stomach growling, but today, a high-pitched skree echoed through the corridors.

"I found it in the human world near a dumpster," Regina announced, holding a tiny, shivering ball of dark fur by its wings. "It was eating a rotten mango. It reminded me of Gura, so I’m keeping it."

Riva adjusted his monocle, leaning in to inspect the creature. It was a fruit bat, its eyes like two polished onyx beads and its nose twitching frantically. "It’s… pungent," Riva noted, though he reached out a gloved finger to stroke its head. "But it has a certain sinister elegance. What shall we call it?"

"Loot," Gura grunted, shuffling forward with a bowl of sliced papaya. "Because it stole my snack the second I sat down. Little thief."

Loot the bat immediately scrambled out of Regina’s hands and onto Gura’s shoulder, burying its face into a piece of fruit.

"See? He’s perfect," Regina declared, crossing her arms. "But I’m the Princess, so I’m in charge of its training. Riva, you’re in charge of its wardrobe. Gura, you’re the feeder."

"A wardrobe for a bat?" Riva mused, his mind already spinning with designs. "Perhaps a miniature top hat? Or a velvet cape to match mine? We can’t have a Mercenare pet looking like a common garden pest."

For the next week, the trio became an unlikely parenting unit. Riva spent hours at his sewing machine, crafting a tiny purple harness encrusted with faux jewels. Gura, surprisingly gentle for a man who could crush boulders, built a "roost" out of an old chandelier, lining it with the softest silks he could find.

"He likes the grapes peeled," Gura muttered one afternoon, meticulously skinning a fruit for the bat.

"Don't spoil him, Gura," Riva teased, draped over a nearby chaise lounge while Loot practiced flying laps around his head. "He'll become as lazy as you."

"He's not lazy, he's calculating," Regina corrected, walking in. She watched as Loot did a clumsy dive-bomb, landing squarely on Riva's top hat and hanging upside down over his eyes.

Riva froze, looking cross-eyed at the fuzzy face dangling in front of him. Loot let out a soft, contented chirp and closed his eyes.

"Well," Riva whispered, a rare, genuine smile tugging at his lips as he reached up to steady the bat. "I suppose even the Shadow Realm could use a little more company."

Gura leaned back, popping a peeled grape into his own mouth. "He stays. But if he touches my steak, he's grounded."

Regina giggled, a sound that for once wasn't spoiled by malice. "He only likes fruit, Gura. He's much more refined than you."

&

The Splendorius palace was drafty, a fact that Regina had decided was personally insulting. To combat the chill, she had used her dark powers for the most important mission to date: a shopping spree in the human world.

"Put them on," Regina commanded, tossing two heavy bundles at Riva and Gura. "Now. Or I'll have the Distains throw you into the frozen wasteland."

Riva unfurled his bundle with two fingers, his monocle nearly popping out. "A... shark? Regina, I am a creature of high fashion and sophisticated malice. I do not wear polyester aquatic predators."

"It has a fin on the back," Gura said, his eyes widening as he shook out a massive, fuzzy grey jumpsuit. "And the hood has teeth. I like it. It looks like it could swallow a cow."

Gura didn't need a second invitation. He stepped into the onesie, zipped it up over his barrel chest, and flipped the hood over his head. He looked less like a fearsome Mercenare general and more like a very large, very comfortable beanbag.

Riva sighed, looking at his own purple-tinted shark onesie. Realizing Regina was already charging up a dark energy bolt, he ducked behind a velvet curtain. A moment later, he emerged. The onesie was surprisingly well-tailored, and he had somehow managed to keep his top hat perched perfectly between the shark's plush

ears.

"I feel... ridiculous," Riva sniffed, though he couldn't help but notice how soft the fleece was.

"You look like a grape-flavored Great White," Regina laughed, already zipped into her own red-and-black shark suit. "Now, where’s the final member of the squad?"

On cue, Loot the fruit bat fluttered into the room. He let out a confused skree until Regina held up a tiny, custom-made shark hoodie no bigger than a teacup.

With Gura holding the bat still and Riva carefully guiding the tiny wings through the armholes, Loot was soon fully outfitted. The bat hung upside down from Gura’s shark-tooth zipper, looking like a miniature, winged shark-morsel.

"Excellent," Regina said, flopping onto a pile of silk cushions. "Gura, bring the snacks. Riva, find a movie. We are not moving until the heater is fixed."

Gura waddled to the kitchen—his tail fin wagging behind him—and returned with a mountain of popcorn and dried mangoes. The three of them piled onto the oversized sofa, a heap of grey, purple, and red fleece.

Loot curled up in the dip of Gura’s shoulder, his tiny shark hood covering his eyes. Riva leaned his head back, feeling the warmth of the group. "I suppose," Riva murmured, adjusting his shark-sleeve, "that if we are to conquer the world, we might as well be cozy while doing it."

Gura just grunted through a mouthful of popcorn. "Best mission ever."

&

The sun was setting over the pier, casting long, orange shadows across the boardwalk. Most humans had gone home, which was exactly when the "Shark Squad" made their move.

"The stealth on these suits is pathetic," Riva complained, adjusting his monocle through the eye-hole of his purple shark hood. "I feel like a giant, plush grape. Why are we crouching?"

"Because we're hunting, Riva!" Regina hissed, her red shark fin bobbing as she crept behind a trash can. "The Glitter Force will never expect an attack from the local marine life."

"I don't think sharks usually walk on land or wear top hats," Gura pointed out, though he didn't seem to mind. He was too busy enjoying the extra-large pockets of his grey onesie, which he had stuffed with enough stolen jerky to survive a small famine.

Loot the bat was tucked securely into the "mouth" of Regina’s hood, his tiny face peeking out from between the felt shark teeth. He let out a supportive skree, flapping his wings in the cramped space.

"Silence, Loot! We’re nearing the target," Regina whispered.

The target was the "Sea-Side Sweets" stand. Regina had decided that the ultimate way to spread despair was to buy every single blue raspberry slushie in existence, leaving the local children thirsty and miserable. It was a petty plan, even for her, but Riva and Gura were happy to indulge her if it meant a night out of the palace.

"Execute Maneuver: Great White!" Regina shouted, leaping from behind the trash can.

Riva sighed but followed suit, waving his cane with theatrical flair. "Behold, humans! Tremble before the—"

He stopped. The stand was closed. A small sign read: Back in 5 minutes. Out of Blue Raspberry.

Regina’s face turned as red as her shark suit. "OUT?! How dare they! I am the Princess of the Shadow Realm! I am a shark! I demand blue liquid!"

"Princess, calm down," Gura said, reaching into his onesie pocket and pulling out a slightly squashed mango. "Here. Eat this before you blow up the pier. We can't be 'stealthy' if there's a crater where the boardwalk used to be."

Regina snatched the fruit, grumbling as she sat cross-legged on the ground. Riva sat beside her, the tail of his purple onesie curling around his legs. Loot climbed out of Regina's hood and hopped onto Riva’s shoulder, nuzzling against the soft fleece.

"You know," Riva said, looking at Gura, who was now sharing a piece of jerky with the bat. "In the dark, with the neon lights... we actually look quite formidable. In a ridiculous, padded sort of way."

Gura grinned, his hood teeth casting a shadow over his face. "Best squad ever."

"Fine," Regina huffed, her anger fading as she leaned against Gura’s bulky, shark-clad shoulder. "But tomorrow, we’re finding a stand that has strawberry. And Riva? You're paying."

"Naturally," Riva smiled, closing his eyes as the cool ocean breeze ruffled their shark fins. For three villains and a bat, it was a perfect night on the hunt.

&

The Splendorius palace was silent, the kind of heavy, oppressive silence that only followed a crushing defeat. The Glitter Force had pushed them back yet again, and

the sting of failure was sharp.

In the dimly lit strategy chamber, Riva stood by the balcony, his back to the room. He had discarded his top hat, his hair slightly disheveled. For once, the theatrical flair was gone, replaced by a weary stillness.

Gura sat at the massive stone table, staring at an empty plate. Usually, he would be raiding the kitchens to dull the pain of defeat, but tonight, his appetite had vanished. He watched Riva’s silhouette against the jagged moon.

"We’re running out of time, Gura," Riva said, his voice low and devoid of its usual playful lilt. "Bel is watching us like a vulture. If we don’t crush those girls soon, we won't just be failures. We’ll be... disposable."

Gura stood up, his heavy footsteps echoing as he crossed the room. He stopped just behind Riva, the height difference making him seem like a literal shield against the shadows.

"Let him watch," Gura grunted. "He’s a snake. But he doesn't have what we have."

Riva turned slightly, a bitter smile on his face. "And what is that? More purple bruises and broken Distains?"

Gura didn't answer with words. Instead, he reached out, his large, calloused hand coming to rest on Riva’s shoulder. It wasn't the rough shove of a teammate or the tactical grip of a soldier. It was steady, grounding, and surprisingly tender.

"He doesn't have someone who’ll go into the blast for him," Gura said firmly. "I’m not in this for the King, Riva. And I’m not in it for the chaos."

Riva looked up at him, his monocle catching the moonlight. The mask of the sophisticated villain cracked, just for a second. He saw the absolute, unwavering loyalty in Gura’s eyes—the kind of devotion that didn't belong in a realm of shadows.

Riva reached up, laying his gloved hand over Gura’s. "You’re a fool, Gura. A gluttonous, stubborn fool."

"Yeah," Gura rumbled, leaning his forehead down to touch Riva’s. "But I'm your fool."

The air between them grew thick, the negative energy of the palace replaced by a desperate, quiet heat. Riva closed his eyes, leaning into the contact. He knew the end was coming—he could feel the betrayal of their allies brewing—but in this small circle of space, they were untouchable.

"I love you, Gura," Riva whispered, the confession sounding like a forbidden spell. "Even if the world ends tomorrow, remember that."

Gura squeezed his shoulder, his voice a low growl of protection. "The world can end. As long as we’re the ones who break it together."

They stood there in the dark, two monsters bound by a light they weren't supposed to have, waiting for the dawn of their final battle.

&

The atmosphere in the Shadow Realm was particularly bleak following a lecture from Bel. The air felt heavy, like lead, and the usual thrill of villainy had been replaced by the cold realization that their time as King Mercenare’s favorites was slipping away.

Riva stood in the secluded observation tower, staring out at the swirling purple vortexes of the horizon. He had removed his monocle, rubbing the bridge of his nose. The theatricality he wore like armor felt too heavy tonight.

"You’re thinking too loud," a deep voice rumbled from the doorway.

Gura stepped into the room, the floorboards groaning under his weight. He wasn't carrying food for once. He walked up to the ledge, standing so close that the heat from his massive frame radiated against Riva’s side.

"I’m calculating, Gura," Riva corrected softly, though there was no bite in his tone. "There is a difference."

"Calculations don't make your hands shake," Gura noted. He reached out, his large hand gently catching Riva’s wrist. "We’ve fought the Glitter Force, we’ve fought the King’s moods, and we’ve fought that snake Bel. Why are you acting like the sky is falling?"

Riva turned to face him, his back against the cold stone railing. "Because if it falls, Gura, I’m worried I won't be able to catch you."

The honesty hung in the air, raw and out of place in a palace built on lies. Gura looked down at Riva, his expression softening from its usual brutish scowl into something intensely focused. He didn't let go of Riva's wrist; instead, he stepped into Riva’s personal space, effectively pinning him against the moonlight.

"You don't have to catch me," Gura whispered, his breath warm. "Just stay next to me."

Riva reached up, his fingers trembling slightly as he traced the line of Gura’s jaw, moving past the sharp teeth that usually terrified their enemies. "You're a brute," Riva murmured, a small, genuine smile finally breaking through. "And you have absolutely no sense of timing."

"I know," Gura grunted.

He didn't wait for a witty retort. Gura leaned down, closing the distance with a suddenness that took Riva’s breath away.

The kiss was unpolished and desperate, a collision of teeth and heat that tasted like the salt of the sea and the iron of the Shadow Realm. It wasn't the elegant, practiced gesture Riva might have imagined in his more private moments; it was a hungry, grounding claim.

Riva gasped into the contact, his hands flying up to grip the front of Gura’s vest, pulling him closer until there was no air left between them. In the darkness of a world that only valued hate, the kiss felt like a riot—a brief, glorious rebellion against their own nature.

When they finally pulled apart, Riva was breathless, his cheeks flushed a deep violet. He looked up at Gura, who was wearing a look of dazed satisfaction.

"Well," Riva whispered, straightening his ruffled collar with shaky fingers. "That was... statistically significant."

Gura let out a low, rumbling chuckle, pulling Riva back into the circle of his arms. "Shut up, Riva. Let’s go find some churros."

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s chest, listening to the steady thrum of a heart that beat only for him. "Fine. But I’m choosing the toppings."

&

The velvet curtains of Riva’s private quarters were drawn tight, shutting out the jagged, neon-purple lightning of the Shadow Realm. Inside, the air was warm and smelled of expensive tea and the faint, sweet scent of the fruit Gura was always snacking on.

For the first time in weeks, the armor was gone. Riva had set aside his top hat and his stiff, high-collared coat, standing now in a simple silk shirt that looked luminous in the candlelight. Gura, usually so loud and taking up so much space, moved through the room with a surprising, heavy grace.

"You’re too quiet," Riva whispered, though he didn't pull away when Gura stepped behind him.

Gura’s large hands came to rest on Riva’s shoulders. He didn't squeeze or push; he simply let the weight of his palms settle there, a grounding force against Riva’s constant, buzzing anxiety. "The world is loud enough," Gura rumbled, his voice vibrating against Riva’s spine. "In here, it doesn't have to be."

Riva turned in the circle of Gura’s arms, looking up at the man who was his only true anchor. The candlelight softened the harsh lines of Gura’s face, making the "monster" the Glitter Force feared look like something else entirely—someone

vulnerable, someone tender.

Riva reached up, his slender fingers brushing the hair back from Gura’s forehead. "You are so careful with me," Riva murmured, a trace of wonder in his voice. "As if I might break."

"I know what's fragile," Gura replied, his gaze locked onto Riva’s. He leaned down, his kiss landing softly on Riva’s temple, then his cheek, before finally lingering on his lips.

It wasn't the desperate, hungry clash of their first encounter. This was slow—a deliberate, rhythmic exploration. Gura’s touch was mindful, his large fingers tracing the line of Riva’s throat with the gentleness of someone handling a rare treasure. He treated Riva not as a subordinate or a partner in crime, but as something sacred.

As they moved toward the bed, the rest of the world—the King’s demands, the Glitter Force’s light, Bel’s treachery—faded into a distant, irrelevant hum. There was only the feeling of skin against skin, the steady cadence of their breathing, and the quiet, shared realization that they were the only two beings in any realm who truly knew each other.

Riva pulled Gura down, his arms wrapping around the bigger man’s neck, anchoring them both. In the soft glow of the room, there was no malice, no envy, and no greed—only a quiet, profound devotion that needed no words to be understood. For this one night, they weren't villains; they were simply two souls finding peace in the center of the storm.

&

The Splendorius palace "throne room" had been converted into a makeshift cinema. Regina sat front and center on a pile of velvet cushions, Loot the bat perched on her head like a fuzzy crown. Riva and Gura were squeezed into an oversized loveseat, both wearing their signature shark onesies, though Riva had insisted on pinning a silk boutonniere to his shark fin.

"Quiet! It’s starting!" Regina commanded, pointing a remote at a stolen human television.

The screen flickered to life with the deep, dramatic swell of a cello. A narrator’s voice boomed: "In the depths of the darkened abyss, a predator lurks..."

"Ooh, that's us," Gura whispered, leaning forward and popping a handful of dried mango into his mouth. "We’re the abyss."

"The Great White," the narrator continued, as a massive shark glided across the screen. "A creature of pure instinct. It does not think. It only eats."

Riva adjusted his monocle, peering at the screen. "The resemblance to you, Gura, is

frankly uncanny. Though I find the shark’s lack of a wardrobe quite distressing. It needs a cravat. Or at least a decent vest."

"Look at the teeth!" Regina cheered, kicking her legs in her red shark suit. "Loot, look! If you practice, you can bite just like that!"

Loot let out a confused skree and tried to nibble on the felt fin of Regina’s hood.

The documentary shifted to a scene of a shark leaping out of the water to catch a seal. The trio went silent.

"Wait," Gura said, pausing mid-chew. "Did he just... fly? Can they do that?"

"It’s called breaching, Gura," Riva explained with a theatrical wave of his hand. "It’s a display of power and theatricality. It’s exactly what we should be doing when we ambush the Glitter Force. Imagine: we burst from the fountain in the park, mid-air, wearing these suits—"

"And I’ll be on your back with a laser!" Regina added, her eyes gleaming with chaotic inspiration.

"But even the ocean's king has enemies," the narrator intoned. "The Orca. The wolf of the sea."

"That’s the Glitter Force," Gura grumbled, pointing a meaty finger at a pod of killer whales. "Always traveling in a pack. Always wearing black and white. It’s annoying."

"They're not even sharks," Regina scoffed, crossing her arms. "They’re just overgrown dolphins. We’re the Shark Squad. We have the teeth. We have the fins. And we have the snacks."

As the credits rolled, the room remained quiet for a moment. Loot had fallen asleep, tucked into the "jaws" of Regina’s hood.

"Riva," Gura said, looking down at his grey fleece sleeves. "Do you think we could get a tank? A big one. For the palace."

Riva sighed, looking at the sleeping bat and the bratty princess, then back at the brute who had become his entire world. He leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the polyester shark fins clashing softly.

"I’ll see what I can do, Gura," Riva murmured. "But only if we can teach them to wear hats."

"Deal," Gura smiled, reaching over to hold Riva’s hand as the "Shark Squad" settled in for a long, cozy nap in the heart of the Shadow Realm.

&

The chaos of the human world was a distant memory, the bright colors of the Glitter Force replaced by the cool, violet shadows of the Mercenare stronghold. In the quiet corner of the strategy room, far from the prying eyes of the other generals, the air felt different—softer, and significantly warmer.

Riva sat perched on the edge of a high-backed stone chair, his fingers idly tracing the gold trim of his hat. He felt the familiar, heavy vibration of footsteps before he heard them. A moment later, Gura settled onto the floor beside the chair, his massive frame creating a solid wall of comfort.

Without a word, Gura leaned in. He didn't use his hands; instead, he pressed his face into the crook of Riva's neck. It wasn't a bite or a growl, but a slow, rhythmic nuzzle. The rough texture of Gura’s skin and the heat of his breath against Riva’s collarbone made the smaller man’s breath hitch.

"You’re like a giant, restless bear," Riva murmured, though his hand instinctively found its way into Gura’s thick hair, his fingers combing through the strands with a tenderness he’d never show in public.

Gura let out a low, rumbling sound deep in his chest—a purr that was more felt than heard. He shifted his head, his nose brushing against Riva’s cheek, seeking out the warmth there. "Too much shouting today," Gura grunted, his voice muffled against Riva’s skin. "Too much light. This is better."

Riva tilted his head back, allowing the contact. He closed his eyes, leaning his weight into the brute who was his only true ally. He began to nuzzle back, his forehead resting against Gura’s, their breaths mingling in the quiet dark.

In the world outside, they were monsters—predators of envy and gluttony. But here, in the sanctuary of each other’s presence, the teeth were hidden and the malice was gone. There was only the steady, comforting friction of skin against skin, and the quiet assurance that no matter how many times the Glitter Force pushed them back, they would always have this small, private corner of the world to return to.

"Stay," Riva whispered, his eyes fluttering shut as Gura’s nuzzle moved to his temple.

"Not going anywhere," Gura promised, his rumble vibrating through them both. "I’m right here."

&

In the heart of the Shadow Realm, the palace was uncharacteristically still. Even the negative energy seemed to slumber, curling like smoke around the four figures collapsed in a heap of shark-themed fleece and velvet blankets.

As they drifted off, their collective consciousness wove together a dream that was

far brighter than the world they inhabited.

Regina dreamed of a sky made of spun sugar. In her sleep, she wasn't a princess of shadows, but a queen of a kingdom where every citizen was a stuffed animal that bowed when she walked by. She was soaring on the back of a giant, spectral Loot, whose wingspan was large enough to eclipse the sun.

"Faster, Loot!" she laughed, her red shark hood flapping in the wind. "To the Glitter Force's palace! We're going to replace all their glitter with sprinkles!"

In her dream, the Glitter Force weren't enemies—they were her backup dancers. They performed a synchronized routine while she stood on a podium made of gold, Loot chirping a melody that sounded like a thousand tiny bells. For once, Regina didn't feel the sharp sting of loneliness or the pressure of her father's expectations; she was simply the center of a world that loved her back.

Gura's dream was much simpler, and significantly more delicious. He found himself standing in the middle of a literal "Sea of Steaks." The waves were made of gravy, and the clouds were giant, fluffy marshmallows.

He waded through the savory tide, laughing as he caught a passing "burger-fish" with his bare hands. But as he turned to take a bite, he saw Riva sitting on a nearby island made of baked potatoes. Riva was wearing a suit made of gold leaf and was meticulously carving a roast with a silver knife.

"Took you long enough, Gura," Riva's dream-self said, offering a plate. "I've saved the best cut for you."

Gura sat down, his heart feeling fuller than his stomach ever could. In the dream, there was no hunger—only the absolute certainty that no matter how much he ate, there would always be enough, and Riva would always be there to share the meal.

Riva dreamed of a stage. It was the grandest theater in existence, with a curtain made of starlight. He was the director, the star, and the choreographer. Every movement he made was met with thunderous applause from an audience of shimmering shadows.

He looked to the wings and saw Gura, looking dapper in a tuxedo that actually fit, holding a bouquet of purple roses.

"The finale, Riva?" Gura asked, his voice like silk.

Riva smiled, taking his hand. "The finale, my dear."

They stepped into the spotlight together. As they took their bow, the theater transformed. The walls melted away, leaving them standing in a quiet, sunlit garden. There were no battles, no Bel, and no King. There was just the warmth of the sun and the steady, grounding presence of the man beside him. For the first

time, Riva’s mind was quiet; he didn't have to calculate or scheme. He just had to be.

Loot, tucked into the crook of Gura’s arm in the waking world, had the smallest dream of all. He dreamed of a giant, infinite mango. He hung upside down from a branch that never broke, surrounded by three large, warm, "human-shaped" heaters that smelled like cinnamon, cologne, and steak.

He let out a tiny, sleeping skree and nuzzled deeper into the grey shark fleece.

The four of them breathed in unison—a princess, two villains, and a bat—all safe within the only world where they were truly allowed to win.

&

The Splendorius kitchen was usually a place of grim efficiency, but today it looked like a candy-colored crime scene.

"More! It needs to be pinker!" Regina shouted, standing on a stool and waving a whisk like a scepter. "I want it to be so pink it makes the Glitter Force’s eyes melt!"

Riva, currently wearing a silk apron over his suit, was meticulously folding food coloring into a massive bowl of buttercream. "Princess, if we add any more 'Neon Rose' pigment, the frosting will become sentient and start its own rebellion."

"I don't care! It’s Loot’s half-birthday!" Regina declared, pointing at the fruit bat.

Loot was currently perched on the edge of a flour sack, wearing a tiny paper party hat that kept slipping over his left eye. He let out a hopeful skree as a dollop of frosting landed near his feet.

Gura, meanwhile, was the "quality control." He was elbow-deep in a secondary bowl, his face already smeared with a vibrant, sugary mustache. "It’s good," Gura muffled, licking a spoonful of the pink sludge. "Tastes like... sparkles and spite."

"Gura, don't eat the structural integrity!" Riva snapped, though he reached over and wiped a smudge of frosting off Gura’s cheek with his thumb.

"I'm just making sure it’s safe for the bat," Gura grinned, leaning into Riva’s touch. "You know how delicate his stomach is."

The task of frosting the three-tier "Dark-Berry Blast" cake began. It was a chaotic process. Regina wanted sugar pearls on every inch; Gura kept trying to "level" the layers by eating the uneven edges; and Riva was desperately trying to keep the bat from dive-bombing the bowl.

Suddenly, a particularly vigorous whisking move from Regina sent a glob of hot-pink frosting flying through the air. It landed with a wet splat right on the bridge of Riva’s

nose.

The kitchen went dead silent. Regina froze. Gura stopped chewing.

Riva slowly reached up, swiped the pink frosting with a finger, and looked at it with a terrifyingly calm expression. Then, with a flick of his wrist, he launched the glob straight at Gura’s forehead.

"Hey!" Gura roared, laughing as he scooped up a handful of buttercream. "Shark attack!"

"Food fight!" Regina shrieked, delighted.

For the next ten minutes, the high-ranking generals of the Mercenare army were completely covered in sticky, sugary pink. Gura looked like a frosted mountain; Riva had pink streaks in his hair that matched his vest; and Regina was cackling as she chased Loot, who was now a very sticky, very pink flying projectile.

Eventually, they all collapsed against the kitchen counter, breathless and covered in sugar.

"We look ridiculous," Riva panted, looking at Gura’s pink-smeared face.

"Yeah," Gura rumbled, leaning over to lick a bit of frosting off Riva’s ear. "But we taste delicious."

Regina rolled her eyes, though she was smiling. "Gross. Now, clean this up before I tell my father you’ve turned the palace into a bakery."

Loot landed on the counter, triumphantly face-planting into a stray pile of frosting. For the "Shark Squad," it was the sweetest victory they’d had in months.

&

The high-pitched skree of distress coming from the velvet rafters was enough to make Riva put down his book. Loot was hanging lopsided from the chandelier, his left wing twitching with a visible cramp.

"The poor creature is exhausted," Riva noted, extending his arm for the bat to flutter down. "Flying laps around the throne room to annoy Bel is a taxing occupation."

Loot landed in Riva’s palm, his tiny chest heaving. One wing remained stiff and half-unfurled, the thin membrane vibrating with tension.

"Move over," Gura rumbled, shifting his massive weight on the sofa to make room. "I’ve got the 'heavy touch.' I'll fix him."

Riva gave him a skeptical look. "Gura, your hands can crush a boulder into gravel.

Loot is roughly the weight of a dried apricot. Perhaps I should handle the delicate maneuvers."

"I can be gentle," Gura insisted, holding out his hand.

They settled into a strange, focused domesticity. Riva held Loot securely in the "nest" of his silk scarf, while Gura used just the very tip of his thumb and forefinger. With surprising precision, Gura began to stroke the base of the bat's wing, where the muscle met the tiny shoulder.

"There you go, little thief," Gura said, his voice a low rumble.

Riva watched, relieved, as Gura’s large fingers gently worked on the delicate wing. "You are surprisingly good at this, Gura," Riva observed, a hint of surprise in his voice.

Loot let out a soft sound, a tiny breath of relief, and finally relaxed his wings. He nestled into the warmth of Gura’s hand, his eyes blinking slowly.

"He seems to like your touch," Riva said, smiling slightly.

"Who wouldn't?" Gura grunted, though he was careful not to disturb the resting bat. "I'm a natural."

Riva chuckled softly, shaking his head. "Perhaps there's more to the Mercenare general than brute strength."

They remained on the sofa, the quiet of the Shadow Realm punctuated only by the gentle sounds of the bat settling down. The fearsome generals, for a moment, were simply two figures tending to a small, injured creature, ensuring even the smallest member of their unconventional group felt safe.

&

In the fan-driven "Shark Squad" universe, fans often headcanon that when Riva and Gura combine their powers to form their final beast mode, the physical toll leaves them with "phantom" sensations once they split back apart. Tonight, after a particularly grueling battle, Riva was feeling every bit of that lingering ache.

The candles in Riva's dressing room were dimmed to a soft amber. Riva sat on a low stool, his purple silk shirt draped loosely over his shoulders, his back to the door. Extending from his shoulder blades were the translucent, violet-tinged bat wings he occasionally manifested—only tonight, they weren't tucked away. They were trembling, the delicate membranes stretched tight with tension.

"You’re wound tighter than a clock spring, Riva," Gura’s voice rumbled from the doorway.

Riva didn't turn around. "It’s the resonance from the combination, Gura. The wings... they won't settle. It’s a rhythmic throb that is quite literally giving me a migraine."

Gura walked over, his heavy boots silent on the plush rug. He sat on the floor behind Riva’s stool, his massive presence immediately radiating a warmth that Riva found himself leaning into.

"I handled the 'Loot' wing-cramp last week," Gura said, his large hands hovering near Riva’s back. "I think I’ve got the technique down. Just... tell me if I’m too rough."

Gura reached out, his thumbs finding the thick muscle at the base of the wing joints. Riva let out a sharp, indrawn breath. Gura’s hands were enormous, capable of shattering stone, but here, they were incredibly deliberate. He began to work in slow, circular motions, his calloused skin grazing the sensitive purple membrane.

"Oh," Riva exhaled, his head falling forward. "That... is statistically significant."

Gura grunted softly, a small smirk playing on his lips. He moved his hands outward, sliding his fingers along the delicate "fingers" of the bat wings. He used the heat of his palms to soothe the aching veins, his touch grounding the chaotic energy still humming through Riva’s nervous system.

"You always try to carry the whole plan on your back," Gura murmured, his voice a low vibration that Riva could feel in his own chest. "Even when we’re one person, I can feel you overthinking. You gotta let the muscle do the work sometimes."

"I am the strategist, Gura," Riva whispered, his eyes fluttering shut. "If I don't think, we—" He gasped as Gura found a particularly stubborn knot near the apex of the wing. "Right there. Don't stop."

Gura leaned in, his chest pressing against Riva’s back as he focused on the spot. The contrast was striking: Riva’s pale, elegant frame and the fragile violet wings held steady by Gura’s dark, powerful hands. It was a picture of absolute trust. In a world where everyone was looking for a way to stab them in the back, Riva was literally handing his most sensitive limbs to the man behind him.

"Better?" Gura asked after a long silence, his thumbs finishing with a final, sweeping stroke down the length of the wings.

Riva let out a long, shuddering sigh of relief. The wings finally went limp, draping softly like velvet curtains against his back before they slowly shimmered and vanished back into his essence.

Riva turned around, his face flushed and his hair messy. He looked at Gura—really looked at him—and reached out to cup the big man's jaw. "You are a brute, Gura. A clumsy, gluttonous, wonderful brute."

Gura chuckled, leaning into the hand. "Does that mean I get to choose the movie tonight?"

Riva smiled, leaning forward to press a lingering kiss to Gura’s forehead. "Tonight, my dear shark... you can choose anything you want."

&

The Splendorius theater room was essentially a hollowed-out cavern with a massive stolen projector, and tonight, Gura held the remote like it was the most powerful artifact in the Shadow Realm.

Riva sat on the sofa, his violet bat wings finally relaxed after the massage, a glass of chilled nectar in his hand. He adjusted his monocle, bracing himself. "Now, Gura, remember our agreement. Last time, we watched a four-hour documentary on the history of the deep-fryer. While educational, it lacked... narrative tension."

Regina sprawled across the floor cushions, Loot the bat perched on her shoulder. "It better be something with a high body count," she demanded. "Or at least someone getting humiliated in public."

Gura grinned, his teeth glinting in the dim light. "Don't worry. I found this on a human 'streaming' thing. It’s called The Great Pastry Great-Off."

Riva blinked. "A baking competition? Gura, we are villains. We deal in despair, not sourdough."

"Just watch," Gura grunted, hitting play.

For the next hour, the room was silent except for the sounds of the show and Gura’s rhythmic snacking. He was leaning forward, his eyes wide as a British woman wept over a collapsed soufflé.

"Look at her face," Gura whispered, pointing a jerky-stained finger at the screen. "That’s the exact look Glitter Heart gets when we trap her in a bubble. That’s pure, sugary despair."

Riva watched a silver-haired judge poke a tart with a fork, declaring it 'soggy-bottomed.' "The psychological warfare is surprisingly sophisticated," Riva admitted, leaning closer to Gura. "The way they build them up only to crush them over a lack of lamination... it’s poetic, in a culinary sense."

Regina, initially bored, was now shouting at the screen. "Use more frosting, you amateur! If you don't win, I’ll find your house and—"

"Princess, it’s pre-recorded," Riva sighed, though he was secretly taking notes on how to use the 'technical challenge' format to trap the Glitter Force in a series of increasingly difficult puzzles.

As the 'Star Baker' was announced, Gura leaned back against Riva, a look of profound satisfaction on his face. "See? I told you. It’s got everything. Tension. Tragedy. And things that look like they taste good."

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the warmth of the big man making the cold palace feel like a home. "I suppose you’re right, my dear. Though next time, I’m choosing a costume drama. I’ve seen enough beige sweaters to last a lifetime."

Gura chuckled, his arm wrapping around Riva to pull him closer. "Deal. But only if we get to keep Loot away from the screen. He tried to eat the lemon drizzle cake during the finale."

Loot let out a defiant skree from Regina's shoulder, and for a few quiet hours, the Shark Squad was perfectly content, unified by the shared joy of watching humans fail at making bread.

&

The clock on the palace wall, salvaged from a clocktower in the human world, struck midnight. In the Splendorius royal quarters, the usual chaos of the "Shark Squad" was finally winding down into a drowsy, comfortable heap.

"I’m not tired," Regina declared, even as she let out a yawn that nearly cracked her jaw. She was already tucked into her oversized bed, her red-and-black shark onesie zipped up to her chin. "I was just... resting my eyes for a more efficient morning of world-ending."

Riva, having shed his boots and top hat for a purple silk robe, was meticulously adjusting the pillows. "Of course, Princess. We wouldn't dream of suggesting otherwise." He looked over at Gura, who was standing by the window, finishing off the last of a stolen box of donuts. "Gura, if you eat one more sprinkle, you’ll be too buoyant to sleep."

Gura grunted, popping the last donut into his mouth and dusting the sugar off his grey shark fleece. "Need the fuel. Dreams are hard work."

The nightly ritual began. It was a practiced, quiet routine that had become the anchor of their strange, villainous family.

First, the "Roost." Gura reached up to the ornate, velvet-lined chandelier and offered his hand to Loot. The fruit bat, also yawning, fluttered down and crawled into the small, cushioned basket Gura had mounted specifically for him. Gura gave the bat a final, gentle poke on the nose. "Night, little thief. Don't eat the curtains."

Next, the "Security Check." Regina watched with half-closed eyes as Riva and Gura performed their final sweep of the room. It wasn't about the Glitter Force—it was about making sure the "Shark Squad" felt safe. Riva checked the locks with a

flourish of his hand, while Gura simply stood by the door for a moment, a massive, silent guardian.

Finally, the "Huddle." Because the palace was perpetually freezing, the three of them—and the bat—tended to gravitate toward the largest bed in the center of the room.

Riva climbed in on one side, his movements graceful and quiet. Gura climbed in on the other, the mattress groaning under his weight, creating a deep, warm valley in the middle that Regina immediately rolled into.

"Riva?" Regina whispered into the dark, her voice sounding small and far less like a princess.

"Yes, Regina?"

"Tell the one about the time we almost trapped Glitter Heart in the giant Jell-O mold."

Riva smiled in the shadows, reaching out to pull the duvet higher. "Ah, yes. A masterpiece of culinary trap-setting..."

As Riva’s melodic, theatrical voice filled the room, Gura’s steady, rhythmic breathing began to slow. He reached across Regina, his large hand finding Riva’s under the covers. Riva squeezed back, his thumb tracing the line of Gura’s knuckles.

By the time Riva reached the part of the story where the Jell-O wobbled, Regina was fast asleep, her head resting on Gura’s arm. Above them, Loot let out a soft, contented skree in his sleep.

Riva leaned his head back against the pillows, looking at the two people—and the bat—who made the darkness bearable. "Sleep well, my sharks," he whispered.

In the heart of the Shadow Realm, the Squad was finally at peace, safe in the only world that mattered: the one they had built for each other.

&

The first sign of life in the Splendorius royal suite was not a majestic sunrise, but the rhythmic, muffled thump-thump-thump of Loot the bat trying to navigate the inside of a silk duvet.

Riva was the first to stir. He sat up with a dignified groan, his purple hair a rare, tangled mess. He looked down to find that at some point during the night, he had become a human pillow. Regina was sprawled diagonally across his legs, snoring softly, while Gura’s massive, grey-fleece-covered arm was draped over Riva’s chest like a fallen redwood tree.

"Gura," Riva whispered, poking the arm. "Gura, wake up. I’ve lost all circulation in my left side. I believe I am becoming a ghost."

Gura didn't wake up. Instead, he let out a low, rumbling snort and pulled Riva closer, mumbling something that sounded suspiciously like "don't take the bacon."

"He’s not going to move until he smells something frying," Regina grumbled, her eyes snapping open. She sat up instantly, looking remarkably alert for someone who had been drooling on a Mercenare general five seconds ago. "Loot! Stop eating the tassels!"

Loot emerged from under the blankets, a single gold thread hanging from his mouth. He did a celebratory loop around the bed before landing squarely on Gura’s nose.

The reaction was instantaneous. Gura’s eyes flew open, he let out a startled bark, and the bed gave a violent lurch as he sat up.

"I'm awake! The shark is hunting!" Gura roared, nearly tossing Riva off the mattress in his confusion. He blinked, looking at his surroundings. "Oh. It’s just morning. And the bat is on my face."

Riva straightened his silk robe with a huff. "A 'Good Morning' would suffice, you beast. Or perhaps a polite apology for the permanent indentation you’ve left on my ribcage."

Gura grinned, the shark-hood of his onesie falling forward over his eyes. "Sorry, Riva. You’re just the right amount of squishy."

"I am elegant, not squishy," Riva sniffed, though he couldn't hide the small smile as Gura reached over to ruffle his messy hair.

The morning ritual began in earnest. Regina demanded her "royal breakfast" (which consisted of chocolate-covered strawberries and exactly one pancake), while Gura lumbered toward the kitchen to start the mountain of eggs required to fuel a shark.

Riva stood by the window, watching the purple clouds of the Shadow Realm churn. Behind him, he heard the sounds of his strange, makeshift family: the sizzle of the pan, Regina’s sharp laughter as Loot tried to steal her strawberry, and Gura’s deep, melodic humming.

"Riva! Get over here!" Gura shouted from the kitchen. "I found the blue raspberry syrup you hid behind the flour!"

Riva sighed, picking up his top hat and adjusting his monocle. He looked at the chaos—the sticky pink frosting still on the counter from the night before, the discarded shark onesies, and the bat currently hanging from the chandelier.

"Coming, Gura," Riva called back, his voice softening.

He didn't need a crown or a world to conquer. As long as the "Shark Squad" was awake and hungry, the day was already a victory.

&

The celebration in the Shadow Realm was fueled by a stolen crate of "Dragon’s Breath" cider from a human festival. Regina had already passed out in a sugar coma after three glasses of sparkling grape juice, leaving Riva and Gura alone in the dim, flickering light of the strategy room.

Riva was currently draped across the stone table like a discarded silk ribbon. His top hat was perched precariously on a nearby gargoyle, and his monocle had long since slid into his empty glass.

"Gura," Riva slurred, pointing a shaky finger at the massive man sitting beside him. "Gura, I have a... a statistical observation."

Gura, who had consumed three-quarters of the cider and a whole ham, let out a slow, rumbling chuckle. His grey shark onesie was unzipped halfway, and his eyes were heavy and glazed with a rare, goofy warmth. "Observations are for nerds, Riva. Have another donut."

"No, listen," Riva insisted, leaning forward until his forehead clunked softly against Gura’s shoulder. "You are... very large. Like a mountain. A mountain made of ham and... and reliability."

Gura wrapped a massive arm around Riva, pulling him flush against his side. "And you’re sparkly," Gura rumbled, his voice vibrating like a low-frequency engine. "You talk too much, but your voice is like... like that fancy syrup. The expensive kind."

Riva let out a high, melodic giggle that he would have been mortified by if he were sober. He reached up, patting Gura’s cheek with both hands. "We should leave, Gura. Let’s take the bat and move to a tropical island. We can start a... a boutique. Or a bakery. I’ll design the aprons, and you can eat the mistakes."

"I like the mistakes," Gura agreed, his head lulling down to rest on top of Riva’s. "Riva?"

"Mmm?"

"I think I’m vibrating. Is the palace vibrating?"

"That’s just your heart, you brute," Riva murmured, closing his eyes and snuggling deeper into the soft grey fleece of Gura’s shoulder. "It’s very loud. It’s quite distracting for my calculations."

Gura squeezed him tighter, his chin rubbing against Riva’s hair. "Good. Stop calculating. Just... stay here."

"Fine," Riva sighed, his voice drifting off into a drowsy haze. "But only because you’re a very comfortable mountain."

Loot the bat, sensing the shift in energy, fluttered down and landed on the heap of velvet and shark fleece, tucking his head under Riva’s robe. As the "Dragon’s Breath" worked its final magic, the two most feared generals of the Mercenare army drifted into a deep, cider-soaked sleep, safe in the only alliance that ever truly mattered.

&

The human world's Summer Festival was a kaleidoscope of heat, lanterns, and the smell of fried dough—a sensory overload that Regina found absolutely mandatory for the "Shark Squad’s" seasonal morale.

"Remember," Riva whispered, adjusting his wide-brimmed straw hat and a pair of oversized sunglasses that masked his violet eyes. "We are here for reconnaissance and high-quality carbohydrates. No dark energy bolts unless someone cuts in line for the takoyaki."

Regina, wearing a red yukata patterned with tiny black sharks, wasn't listening. She was already dragging Gura toward a stall draped in colorful banners. "Gura! Look! Goldfish scooping! I want the one that looks the grumpiest. It reminds me of Bel."

Gura, looking like a very muscular "tourist" in a Hawaiian shirt that featured palm trees and—naturally—great white sharks, let out a low whistle. "As long as there’s a stall for grilled squid nearby, Princess, I’m your muscle."

Hidden inside Gura’s deep shirt pocket, Loot the bat was vibrating with excitement. He poked his nose out, his tiny ears twitching at the sound of the flutes. Riva reached down, discreetly feeding the bat a piece of shaved ice from a paper cone.

"Patience, Loot," Riva murmured, his gaze softening as he watched Gura successfully scoop three fish at once, much to the vendor's horror. "The fireworks are the main event."

As the sun dipped below the horizon, the squad found a secluded spot on a grassy hill overlooking the pier. They were weighed down by a dizzying array of festival spoils: three bags of cotton candy, a giant stuffed shark Gura had won at a ring-toss, and enough yakisoba to feed a small army.

"Look," Gura said, his voice dropping to that warm, private rumble as he leaned against Riva’s shoulder.

The first firework blossomed in the sky—a massive, shimmering flower of gold and

violet.

"Ooh!" Regina cheered, standing up and waving a glow-stick. "It’s like a Distain explosion, but without the screaming!"

Loot scrambled out of Gura’s pocket and climbed onto Riva’s shoulder, his onyx eyes reflecting the cascading lights. Riva didn't look at the sky, though; he looked at the group around him. He saw the genuine, uncalculated joy on Regina’s face, and the way Gura’s hand instinctively found his in the grass, their fingers locking together in the dark.

"It’s almost enough to make one forget we’re supposed to be villains," Riva whispered.

Gura squeezed his hand, his thumb tracing a slow circle over Riva’s knuckles. "Who says villains can’t have a summer vacation? We’re just... off the clock."

As a final, thunderous volley of red and silver lit up the sky, Regina flopped back onto the grass between them, exhausted and sugar-high. Loot curled up in the crook of her neck, his wings finally still.

In the 2026 summer heat, surrounded by the echoes of human celebration, the Shark Squad sat in silence. They were a princess, two monsters, and a bat, perfectly content to let the world remain un-conquered for just one more night.

&

The aftermath of the 2026 Summer Festival had left the Shark Squad in a state of "tactical stickiness." Between the humidity of the human world, exploded cotton candy, and a minor incident involving a leaking bottle of blue raspberry syrup, a group bath was the only solution to prevent the palace from becoming a permanent flypaper trap.

The Splendorius royal washroom was a cavernous chamber of black marble and steam. A massive, sunken tub—large enough to float a small yacht—had been filled with bubbling, lavender-scented water, a luxury Riva insisted upon to "cleanse the commoner's grime."

"I am a shark! Sharks don't use loofahs!" Gura roared, though he was already sitting in the waist-deep water, his massive shoulders covered in a mountain of white bubbles.

"Sharks also don't smell like a fermented fruit stand, Gura," Riva countered. He was perched on the edge of the tub, his silk robe discarded, meticulously scrubbing Regina’s hair. "And sit still, Princess. If I get soap in your eyes, you’ll blow a hole in the ceiling."

Regina huffed, splashing a handful of bubbles at Gura. "It’s not my fault the human

world is so... dusty! Loot, stop that! You’re not a submarine!"

Loot was currently having the time of his life. The bat had discovered that if he flapped his wings just above the water's surface, he could create a miniature wake. He looked like a soggy, flying gremlin, his fur slicked down until he was half his usual size.

"He looks like a drowned rat," Gura chuckled, reaching out a massive, wet hand to let the bat land on his thumb. Gura began to gently rinse the sticky syrup from Loot’s wings with a cup of warm water. "There you go, little thief. Back to being a predator."

Riva finally finished with Regina and stepped into the warm water himself, sinking down beside Gura. The transition from the cold palace air to the steaming bath made him let out a long, shuddering sigh of relief.

"Better?" Gura murmured, his voice echoing off the marble walls.

"Immeasurably," Riva replied. He leaned back, resting his head on Gura’s damp shoulder. In the privacy of the steam, the "refined strategist" looked soft, his violet eyes half-closed.

Gura picked up a sponge, and with a tenderness that still surprised Riva in 2026, began to scrub the lingering traces of festival face-paint from Riva’s back. "You’ve got glitter behind your ears," Gura noted, his thumb lingering on the sensitive skin there. "The Glitter Force really is a plague."

"A plague we shall deal with tomorrow," Riva whispered, turning in the water to face him. He reached up, his wet fingers tracing the line of Gura’s jaw. "Tonight... we are just clean."

Regina, now wrapped in a plush red towel at the edge of the tub, watched them with a rare, quiet smile. She picked up a soggy, but happy, Loot and began to blow-dry him with a small gust of wind magic.

"Don't take too long," Regina called out, heading toward the door. "Gura promised we’d have a 'clean shark' movie night with the fancy popcorn."

"Coming, Princess!" Gura shouted back. He looked at Riva, his eyes dark and full of affection in the flickering candlelight. He leaned in, giving Riva a quick, soap-tasting kiss. "Race you to the towels?"

"You’re a brute, Gura," Riva laughed, splashing him as he scrambled toward the marble steps. "But you’re my brute."

&

The Splendorius theater room was a cavern of flickering blue light, the only sound

the rhythmic crunch of Gura’s "Extra-Butter Megabowl." The 2026 Shark Squad tradition was in full swing: a triple-feature of the most scientifically inaccurate shark movies the human world had to offer.

"Look at the CGI on that one," Riva remarked, gesturing with a silk-gloved hand toward the screen where a shark was currently leaping over a helicopter. "The aerodynamics are an insult to my intelligence. And the shark isn't even wearing a hat. How does anyone know it’s the leader?"

"Who cares about hats? It just ate a helicopter!" Gura roared, a stray kernel of popcorn bouncing off his grey shark onesie. He was sprawled across the sofa, his massive frame acting as a heated mattress for the rest of the squad.

Regina was tucked into the crook of Gura’s arm, her red shark hood pulled up so only her eyes and a few blonde bangs were visible. "I like the part where the humans scream," she noted with a satisfied hum. "Loot, look! That shark has more teeth than Gura!"

Loot the bat was perched on the rim of Gura’s popcorn bowl, meticulously picking out the pieces with the most salt. He let out a tiny, muffled skree of agreement, his fur still smelling faintly of the lavender soap from their earlier bath.

"The pacing is atrocious," Riva continued, though he didn't pull away when Gura shifted to pull him closer. Riva rested his head on Gura’s shoulder, the soft polyester of their matching onesies friction-locking them together. "However, the protagonist's descent into madness is... relatable. I felt the same way when Glitter Heart gave that speech about the 'Power of Friendship' for the fiftieth time."

Gura chuckled, a deep vibration that Riva could feel in his own ribs. "You’re just cranky because the shark didn't have a signature cane. Here, eat a chocolate-covered squid ring. It’ll help you focus on the carnage."

Gura popped the snack into Riva’s mouth. Riva chewed thoughtfully, his violet eyes never leaving the screen. "Hmm. Acceptable. Though I still maintain that a shark with a monocle would be ten percent more terrifying."

As the second movie reached its climax—a "Mega-Shark" fighting a "Giant Octopus"—the energy in the room shifted from critique to cozy exhaustion. Regina’s head began to loll against Gura’s chest, her glow-stick falling onto the rug. Loot, overcome by a salt-induced food coma, crawled into the "mouth" of Gura’s shark-hood and fell fast asleep.

"They're out," Gura whispered, his voice dropping to a low, warm rumble.

Riva looked at the sleeping princess and the bat, then up at the man who had become his entire world. He reached out, his fingers tangling with Gura’s large, calloused hand. "It was a successful selection, Gura. Statistically, the best shark

night of 2026 so far."

Gura squeezed his hand, his eyes reflecting the blue glow of the television. "Only 'cause I got the best seat in the house."

Riva smiled, closing his eyes as the sound of a fictional shark’s roar filled the room. In the heart of the Shadow Realm, the Shark Squad was safe, fed, and perfectly at home in the dark.

&

In the quiet depths of the Shadow Realm palace, the "Shark Squad" lay in a tangled heap of grey, purple, and red fleece. As the 2026 winter winds howled against the jagged stone windows, their minds drifted into a shared subconscious landscape, a place where the rules of King Mercenare no longer applied.

Regina dreamed of a world made entirely of velvet and neon. In her vision, she sat upon a throne shaped like a giant, shimmering shark fin. Beside her, a human-sized Loot stood as her royal herald, wearing a tiny tuxedo and blowing a silver trumpet.

"The Glitter Force has arrived, Princess!" Loot chirped in a voice like a choir of bells.

Regina looked down to see the Glitter Force girls, but they weren't fighting. They were dressed as court jesters, juggling glowing spheres of pure happiness that they handed to her like offerings. For once, the hollow ache in Regina’s chest was filled. She wasn't a villain or a weapon; she was simply a girl who was loved by everyone, and her father’s shadow was nowhere to be found.

Gura’s dream was a sensory masterpiece. He was floating in a literal "Sea of Sweets," where the water was warm chocolate and the islands were made of slow-roasted brisket. Every time he took a bite of a passing doughnut-cloud, a new one appeared instantly.

But the best part of the dream wasn't the food. It was Riva, sitting on a gingerbread pier, wearing a chef’s hat made of silk. Riva wasn't yelling about plans or statistics; he was laughing, his violet eyes bright with genuine joy.

"Eat up, Gura," Riva’s dream-self said, handing him a golden plate that never emptied. "I’ve seasoned everything exactly how you like it. We have all the time in the world."

Gura felt a profound sense of peace. In this world, his hunger wasn't a curse—it was a celebration, and he finally had someone to share the feast with forever.

Riva dreamed of a grand, celestial clockwork. He stood in the center of a massive theater, orchestrating the movements of the stars with his cane. Everything was precise, elegant, and perfectly under his control.

He felt a familiar warmth behind him. He turned to find Gura, looking dapper in a suit that didn't pinch his shoulders, holding a bouquet of crystal roses.

"The show is perfect, Riva," Gura whispered, his voice a low, melodic rumble. "But I think the director needs a break."

Gura took Riva’s hand, and the theater melted away into a quiet, sunlit garden. There were no battles, no Bel, and no looming threat of destruction. Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the ticking of the clocks replaced by the steady, calm heartbeat of the man beside him. For the first time, Riva’s mind was quiet. He didn't have to be the smartest person in the room; he just had to be Riva.

Loot, tucked into the crook of Gura’s elbow in the waking world, had the smallest, sweetest dream of all. He dreamed of a giant, infinite mango that was always at the perfect stage of ripeness. He hung upside down from a branch that felt exactly like Riva’s silk scarf, surrounded by three large, warm "sharks" who never let the heater go out.

As 2026 turned toward another day, the four of them breathed in unison—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—all safe within the only world where they were truly allowed to win.

&

The Port Huron pier was encased in a biting January chill as the Shark Squad materialized near Pine Grove Park. It was Friday night, January 16, 2026, and the Michigan air hovered at a crisp 31°F, with light snow beginning to dust the boardwalk.

"I fail to see the 'strategic advantage' of freezing our fins off in this tundra, Regina," Riva shivered, pulling his purple shark onesie tight. He adjusted his sunglasses, though the sun had long since set over Lake Huron. "Statistically, there is a ninety percent chance my toes have already turned into ice cubes."

"Quit whining, Riva! Look at the lights!" Regina pointed toward the park's winter displays, her red shark hood dusted with fresh snowflakes. "It’s 2026! We need a new victory photo for the palace mantle."

Gura, who seemed entirely immune to the cold thanks to his massive frame and a steady diet of festival snacks, was currently trying to catch snowflakes on his tongue. "It tastes like cold water," he reported, sounding disappointed. "Needs more chocolate."

In his pocket, Loot the bat was vibrating like a pager. Gura reached in and pulled out a small thermos. "Don't worry, little thief. I brought the heated mango puree." Loot let out a muffled skree of approval, sticking his head into the warm cup.

The squad wandered toward the Blue Water Bridge, where the lights reflected off the icy St. Clair River. A group of humans was walking by, bundled in heavy parkas, but they barely spared a glance at the three sharks. In Port Huron, a town currently hosting a "Big Freeze" cornhole tournament, three people in aquatic onesies were barely the strangest thing on the street.

"Look," Gura said, stopping near a park bench. He pointed a grey-fleece finger at a nearby sign: Snowy Saturdays – Free Snacks and Hot Cocoa at Palmer Park. "Riva, it says 'Free Snacks.' We're a day early, but I think we can use our 'villainous influence' to convince someone to open the pantry."

Riva sighed, but the sight of Gura’s genuine excitement—and the way his breath puffed out in white clouds—made him soften. He reached out and caught a snowflake on his gloved finger. "Fine. But if we are going to 'liberate' some hot cocoa, we are doing it with style."

"Race you to the rec center!" Regina shouted, already sprinting toward the park’s snow-covered hills.

Gura laughed, a deep rumble that echoed off the frozen river, and took Riva’s hand, pulling him along into the 2026 winter night. "Come on, Riva! The first shark to the cocoa gets the extra marshmallows!"

"You're a brute, Gura," Riva panted, struggling to keep his top hat on as they ran. "But you're the only brute I'd freeze for."

&

The Splendorius dining hall was unusually quiet on this Friday evening, January 16, 2026. The flickering torchlight glinted off a massive bowl of spaghetti—Regina’s latest demand for a "civilized" squad dinner.

"Now, the human etiquette manual is quite clear," Riva lectured, adjusting a silk napkin around his neck despite being dressed in his purple shark onesie. "One must twirl the pasta around the fork. Slurping is for peasants and Distains."

Gura, sitting across from him, stared at his plate as if it were a complex puzzle. "Riva, I have teeth designed for crushing armor. This stuff is basically edible string. Why can’t I just... vacuum it up?"

"Because we are the Shark Squad, not the Garbage Squad," Regina snapped, already tangled in a long strand of pasta. She looked at Loot, who was hanging upside down from a candelabra, sniffing the steam. "Loot, don't you dare drop onto the meatballs. They’re the best part."

Loot let out a defiant skree and executed a perfect dive-bomb, landing squarely on the edge of Gura’s plate. He didn't want the meat; he was after the single,

decorative slice of tomato Regina had discarded.

"He’s got the right idea," Gura grunted. He abandoned the fork and leaned down, taking a massive forkful of spaghetti. As he pulled back, a single, long noodle remained connected to the pile—and to Riva’s fork.

Riva froze. He had been about to take a bite, but he found himself locked in a "Lady and the Tramp" scenario that was statistically improbable.

The room went silent. Regina stopped mid-chew, her eyes widening. "Oh, this is going to be hilarious."

Riva looked at Gura, whose eyes were wide with a mix of surprise and a very specific kind of mischief. Neither of them pulled away. Slowly, with a smirk playing on his lips, Riva began to eat his end of the noodle. Gura, never one to back down from a challenge—or a meal—did the same.

The gap between them closed. The smell of garlic and tomato sauce was thick in the air. Just as their noses were about to touch, Gura lunged for the final inch, his lips meeting Riva’s in a messy, tomato-stained kiss.

"Gross!" Regina shrieked, though she was giggling as she threw a meatball at them. "Get a room! Or at least a wet wipe!"

Riva pulled back, dabbing his mouth with his silk napkin, his face flushed a deep violet. "Gura, you are a savage. A sauce-covered, gluttonous savage."

"Yeah," Gura grinned, wiping a smudge of red off his chin with his shark-fleece sleeve. "But I'm the only savage who’s gonna share the last meatball with you."

Gura slid the final meatball onto Riva’s plate. Riva looked at it, then at the man who had become his entire world in 2026. He cut the meatball in half, offering one piece back to Gura.

Loot chirped from the table, successfully stealing a noodle and retreating to the rafters. In the heart of the Shadow Realm, the spaghetti was messy, the etiquette was forgotten, and the Shark Squad was perfectly, happily full.

&

The Splendorius royal washroom was a cavernous hall of black marble, now filled with enough steam to hide a small fleet of ships. It was Friday night, January 16, 2026, and the Shark Squad was currently dealing with the "sticky" consequences of a failed ambush involving a human syrup factory.

"I am a creature of the deep! I do not require a loofah!" Gura’s voice echoed off the tiles, followed by a massive splash as he lowered himself into the sunken tub. His grey shark onesie sat discarded on a gold-plated bench, and he was currently

wearing a mountain of lavender bubbles as a makeshift crown.

"Gura, you are currently sixty percent sugar and forty percent audacity," Riva countered. He was perched on the edge of the tub, his silk robe sleeves rolled up, meticulously scrubbing the pink strawberry glaze from Regina’s hair. "If we don’t get this off, you’ll be hunted by every ant in the Shadow Realm."

Regina huffed, splashing a handful of bubbles at Gura. "It’s not my fault the Glitter Force uses 'sticky' tactics! Loot, stop that! You’re not a submarine!"

Loot the bat was having the time of his life. He had discovered that if he flapped his wings just above the water's surface, he could create a miniature wake. He looked like a soggy, flying gremlin, his fur slicked down until he was half his usual size. He let out a wet skree and dived into a pile of suds on Gura’s shoulder.

"He likes the bubbles," Gura chuckled, reaching out a massive, wet hand to let the bat land on his thumb. With a tenderness that defied his strength, Gura used a cup of warm water to rinse the sticky syrup from Loot’s wings. "There you go, little thief. Back to being a predator."

Riva finally finished with Regina and stepped into the steaming water himself, sinking down beside Gura. The transition from the cold palace air to the warmth of the bath made him let out a long, shuddering sigh. "Statistically, this is the only logical part of our day."

"Better?" Gura murmured, sliding an arm around Riva’s shoulders through the bubbles.

"Immeasurably," Riva replied. He leaned back, resting his head on Gura’s damp chest. In the privacy of the steam, the "refined strategist" looked soft, his violet eyes half-closed.

Gura picked up a sponge and began to gently scrub the lingering traces of glitter from Riva’s back. "You’ve got pink sparkles behind your ears," Gura noted, his thumb lingering on the sensitive skin there. "The Glitter Force really is a plague."

"A plague we shall deal with tomorrow," Riva whispered, turning in the water to face him. He reached up, his wet fingers tracing the line of Gura’s jaw. "Tonight... we are just clean."

Regina, now wrapped in a plush red towel at the edge of the tub, watched them with a rare, quiet smile. She picked up a soggy, but happy, Loot and began to blow-dry him with a small gust of wind magic.

"Don't take too long," Regina called out, heading toward the heated floors of the bedroom. "Gura promised we’d have a 'clean shark' movie night with the fancy popcorn."

"Coming, Princess!" Gura shouted back. He looked at Riva, his eyes dark and full of affection in the flickering candlelight of 2026. He leaned in, giving Riva a quick, soap-tasting kiss. "Race you to the towels?"

"You’re a brute, Gura," Riva laughed, splashing him as he scrambled toward the marble steps. "But you’re my brute."

&

The violet lightning of the Shadow Realm flickered outside the heavy stone windows, but inside Riva’s quarters, the world was reduced to the warm, amber glow of a single low-burning candle. It was Friday night, January 16, 2026, and for a rare moment, the chaos of the "Shark Squad" had been replaced by a profound, heavy stillness.

Riva stood by the edge of the bed, his silk shirt unbuttoned at the collar. Without his top hat and monocle, he looked vulnerable, the mask of the theatrical strategist discarded. When Gura stepped into the light, his massive frame usually filled the room with an intimidating presence, but tonight, his movements were slow and mindful.

"Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice dropping to a register so low it was felt more than heard.

Riva turned, reaching out to rest his hands on Gura’s broad chest. Underneath the muscle, he could feel the steady, powerful thrum of Gura’s heart—a rhythm that had become his own anchor. "The world outside is loud, Gura," Riva whispered, stepping into the big man's space. "But here... there is only us."

Gura’s large, calloused hands came up to frame Riva’s face with a gentleness that defied his strength. He leaned down, pressing his forehead against Riva’s. The contact was grounding, a silent promise of protection.

When they finally moved together, it wasn't the hungry clash of a battle. It was a slow, rhythmic exploration of everything they usually kept hidden. Gura was incredibly mindful of his power, his touch becoming a lingering caress as he traced the line of Riva’s shoulders. Every sensation was heightened by the quiet—the heat of skin against skin, the soft rustle of silk, and the sheer weight of Gura’s devotion.

Riva arched into the contact, a soft, breathless sound escaping his throat. He looked up into Gura’s eyes, seeing not a monster, but the man who had become his entire universe. The pleasure was not just physical; it was the overwhelming relief of being truly seen and entirely safe.

"Gura," Riva breathed, his voice trembling with a sincerity he had never permitted himself before. "I love you. Truly."

Gura froze for a heartbeat, his gaze softening into something profoundly tender. He leaned down, his kiss landing softly on Riva’s lips, tasting of salt and absolute loyalty.

"I know," Gura whispered against his mouth, his arms tightening to pull Riva flush against his heart. "And I love you. Always."

In the sanctuary of the dark on this winter night in 2026, the two villains found a peace that the Glitter Force could never provide. They weren't fighting for a kingdom; they were simply two souls, finally and completely home in each other's arms.

&

The sun had not yet dared to rise over the jagged peaks of the Shadow Realm on this Saturday morning, January 17, 2026, but inside the royal suite, the silence was about to be violently dismantled.

Regina stood at the foot of the massive, velvet-draped bed, tapping her foot with the kind of impatience only a Mercenare princess could muster. Beside her, perched on a silver tray, Loot the bat was vibrating with equal parts energy and hunger.

In the center of the bed, the "Shark Squad" generals were currently a tangled, snoring heap of grey and purple fleece. Gura was sprawled on his back, his mouth slightly open as he dreamt of a world made of infinite churros. Riva was curled against Gura’s side, his head resting on the big man’s shoulder, his top hat perched ironically on the bedpost above them.

"This is unacceptable," Regina whispered to Loot. "It’s already past 8:00 AM. The world isn't going to conquer itself if they’re busy hibernating."

Loot let out a sharp, supportive skree.

"Exactly," Regina smirked. "Loot, execute Maneuver: Sonic Wake-Up."

The bat didn't need a second order. He took flight, a blurred streak of fuzzy brown fur, and began to dive-bomb the sleeping duo. He executed a perfect mid-air barrel roll, his wings flapping inches from Riva’s nose, before landing squarely on Gura’s open mouth.

"Gah! I’m eating a rug! The rug is fighting back!" Gura roared, bolting upright with a start. The bed gave a terrifying lurch, sending Riva sliding toward the edge.

"Gura! For the love of—" Riva scrambled to catch himself, his purple hair a chaotic mess that defied the laws of physics. He blinked through the sleep, looking at the princess standing triumphantly at the foot of the bed. "Regina? Is the palace on fire? Or have the Glitter Force developed a taste for early morning raids?"

"Worse," Regina declared, crossing her arms. "I’m hungry. And Gura promised we’d go to that 2026 Winter Pancake Festival in the human world today."

Gura rubbed his eyes, the shark-hood of his onesie falling over his face. He reached out and gently plucked a soggy Loot from his chin. "Pancakes? Why didn't you say so?" He looked over at Riva, who was still trying to regain his dignity. "Come on, Riva. The Princess is right. If we don't get there early, the humans will eat all the blueberry ones."

Riva sighed, but as Gura reached over to pull him into a brief, warm "good morning" hug, the irritation melted away. He looked at the bratty princess and the fluttering bat, then at the muscular brute who was already looking for his socks.

"Very well," Riva murmured, reaching for his monocle on the nightstand. "But I am not leaving this palace until someone finds my silk scarf. If we are to be 'pancake pirates,' we shall do it with style."

Loot let out a celebratory chirp and landed on Riva’s head. The Shark Squad was officially awake, and by 9:00 AM, the human world wouldn't know what hit its breakfast buffet.

&

The 2026 Winter Pancake Festival in Port Huron, Michigan, was a sea of beanies, heavy coats, and the sweet, cloying scent of maple syrup. It was Saturday morning, January 17, 2026, and the "Shark Squad" was moving through the crowd with the subtle grace of a tidal wave.

"The air is thirty-four degrees, yet these humans are standing in a line for processed flour as if it were the Fountain of Youth," Riva remarked, his breath forming elegant plumes of white steam. He had traded his top hat for a purple fur-lined cap, though his signature sunglasses remained firmly in place.

"Less talking, more syrup-seeking!" Regina commanded, her red-and-black shark onesie peeking out from under a heavy parka. She pointed a gloved finger at a large tent labeled The Grand Flapjack Station. "Gura, use your 'intimidating presence' to get us a table. Now!"

Gura, wearing an oversized flannel shirt over his grey shark onesie, let out a low chuckle. "I don't need to be intimidating, Princess. I just need to be hungry."

In his breast pocket, Loot the bat was vibrating like a tectonic plate. Gura reached in and pulled out a single, miniature blueberry pancake he’d "acquired" from a passing tray. Loot let out a muffled skree of delight, his tiny face disappearing into the fluffy cake.

They managed to secure a picnic table near the back of the tent. Within minutes,

Gura returned with a tray that looked like a structural hazard. It was a mountain of pancakes, topped with whipped cream, strawberries, and a literal river of Michigan maple syrup.

"Observe the sheer lack of nutritional value," Riva sighed, even as he meticulously cut a perfect, bite-sized square from the top of the stack. "It is statistically the most inefficient fuel source on the planet." He popped the piece into his mouth. "However... the texture is acceptable."

"Acceptable? It’s a masterpiece!" Gura roared, already four pancakes deep. He looked at Riva, his eyes bright with the simple, uncalculated joy of the moment. He reached over and wiped a smudge of whipped cream off Riva’s nose with his thumb. "See? Better than palace food."

Regina was busy decorating her own stack with a pattern of chocolate chips that looked suspiciously like a Mercenare sigil. "If the Glitter Force shows up, I’m going to trap them in a giant bottle of syrup. We’ll see how 'sparkly' they are when they’re covered in goo."

The four of them sat in the heart of the 2026 festival, surrounded by the laughter and chatter of the humans they usually plotted to conquer. For this one Saturday morning, the Shadow Realm felt a million miles away.

Loot finally emerged from the blueberry pancake, looking like a very sticky, very happy blue smudge. Riva reached out, his hand finding Gura’s under the table, their fingers interlocking in a quiet, warm promise.

"A successful mission, Gura," Riva whispered.

"The best," Gura agreed, leaning in to give Riva a quick, maple-scented kiss. "Now, who wants seconds?"

&

The January night in Port Huron was crystalline, the air so cold it felt sharp against the lungs. It was Friday, January 16, 2026, and the Shark Squad had retreated to the top of the Blue Water Bridge, perched high above the icy St. Clair River where the human world couldn't reach them.

"The forecast indicated a minor meteor shower tonight," Riva remarked, his purple shark onesie glowing under the moonlight. He checked his pocket watch, the silver casing cold in his hand. "Statistically, the peak visibility is within the next ten minutes."

"I don't see anything but darkness and fish," Gura grunted, leaning his massive frame against a suspension cable. He had Loot tucked inside his hood for warmth; the bat was currently a tiny, snoring ball of brown fur. "Are you sure the stars didn't

get cancelled, Riva?"

"Stars don't get 'cancelled,' Gura. They—"

"There!" Regina shouted, pointing a gloved finger toward the north.

A streak of brilliant white light slashed across the sky, followed by another in a shimmering trail of silver. For a moment, the black void above Michigan was alive with falling fire.

"Whoa," Gura whispered, his breath hitching. He reached out and grabbed Riva’s hand, his large palm warm despite the 31°F temperature. "They look like they’re falling right into the lake."

Regina stood on her tiptoes, her red shark hood falling back to reveal her wide, wondering eyes. "I wish," she started, then stopped, her voice losing its royal edge. "I wish we could stay like this. No King, no Glitter Force. Just... the Squad."

Loot woke up at the sound of her voice, poking his head out of Gura’s hood. He let out a soft skree as a particularly bright meteor flared overhead, reflecting in his onyx eyes.

Riva squeezed Gura’s hand, feeling the steady, grounding thrum of the big man’s pulse. In 2026, amidst all their schemes and failures, this was the only constant he relied on. He looked at the streak of light and made his own silent wish—not for power or a kingdom, but for more nights like this one, where the only thing he had to calculate was how close he could get to Gura.

"Look, another one!" Gura cheered, pulling Riva flush against his side. The polyester of their shark suits rubbed together with a soft shush.

"Make a wish, Riva," Gura murmured, his voice a low, private rumble against Riva’s ear.

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, watching the silver rain fall over the border of 2026. "I don't need to, Gura," Riva whispered. "I’m already holding everything I want."

The four of them stood in silence as the heavens wept light over the frozen river—a princess, two monsters, and a bat, perfectly at home in the dark.

&

The 2026 Michigan winter wind rattled the stone window-frames of the Splendorius palace, but inside the royal suite, the Shark Squad had created a fortress of warmth. It was 9:47 PM on Friday, January 16, 2026, and the nightly ritual had reached its final, most sacred stage.

"The pillow-to-blanket ratio is currently sub-optimal, Gura," Riva remarked, though he was already sinking into the massive, velvet-draped bed. He was dressed in his signature purple shark onesie, his top hat perched ironically on the headboard.

"Stop calculating and get in the huddle," Gura rumbled. He was a mountain of grey fleece, already settled into the center of the mattress. Regina had claimed her spot in the "valley" between the two generals, her red shark hood pulled up so only her expectant eyes were visible. Loot the bat was hanging upside down from Gura’s thumb, his tiny wings twitching in a pre-sleep stretch.

"Story!" Regina commanded, poking Riva’s arm. "And not a boring one about logistics or monocle maintenance. I want a legend."

Riva sighed, but a small, affectionate smile tugged at his lips. He reached out and dimmed the nearby torch with a flick of his wrist, leaving the room bathed in a soft, violet glow.

"Very well," Riva began, his voice dropping into the melodic, theatrical tone that always signaled a masterpiece. "Long ago, before the first Glitter Force ever uttered a speech about friendship, there was a kingdom made entirely of obsidian and ice. It was ruled by a Great White Shark who wore a crown of frozen starlight."

Gura leaned back, his massive arm wrapping around both Riva and Regina. "Did he have a snack bar?"

"He had an infinite banquet of moon-glow and grilled calamari," Riva corrected smoothly. "But the Shark King was lonely. His kingdom was cold, and his heart was made of a single, unpolished diamond. One night, a tiny shadow-bat—much like our Loot—flew into his throne room, carrying a message from the Red Princess of the Crimson Sea."

Loot let out a soft, sleepy skree at the mention of his name.

"The Princess told the King that a great storm was coming," Riva continued, his voice becoming a hypnotic whisper. "A storm of 'Annoying Sparkles' that threatened to turn the world into a giant, sugary cupcake. So, the Shark King called upon his wisest advisor—a purple shark with impeccable fashion sense—and they formed an alliance. They realized that as long as they stayed together, no amount of glitter could ever melt their ice."

Gura’s breathing began to slow, the steady, rhythmic thrum of his chest acting as a metronome for the story. Regina’s eyes fluttered shut, her head coming to rest on Gura’s shoulder.

"In the end," Riva whispered, his hand finding Gura’s under the heavy duvet, their fingers interlocking in the dark of 2026, "the Shark King realized that the diamond in his heart wasn't made of ice at all. It was made of the heat from his friends. And

they lived in the shadows, perfectly content, forever."

By the time the story finished, the only sound in the room was the rhythmic breathing of the Squad. Gura was fast asleep, his thumb still held gently by the bat. Regina was a quiet heap of red fleece.

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, looking at the two people—and the bat—who had turned a realm of shadows into a home. "Goodnight, my sharks," he murmured, closing his eyes as the January night settled over them all.

&

The violet moonlight of the Shadow Realm was finally beginning to yield to a hazy, bruised-looking dawn on this Saturday morning, January 17, 2026. Inside the royal suite, Riva was already awake, his internal clock far more precise than the hulking mountain of grey fleece beside him.

Riva sat up, smoothing his purple shark onesie with a practiced hand. He looked down at Gura, who was currently a one-man earthquake of rhythmic snores. Gura was sprawled diagonally across the bed, his mouth slightly open, his massive arm pinned under the weight of a sleeping Regina. Loot the bat was tucked into the crook of Gura's neck, rising and falling with every deep breath.

"Gura," Riva whispered, poking a finger into the soft polyester of Gura’s shoulder. "Gura, the sun—or at least the slightly less dark part of the sky—has arrived."

The only response was a particularly loud snort and a mumble about "extra syrup."

Riva sighed, a faint, affectionate smirk tugging at his lips. He adjusted his monocle and leaned in closer, his voice dropping to a theatrical purr. "Gura, my dear brute, if you don't wake up this instant, I am going to tell Regina that you ate the last of the blueberry pancakes in your sleep."

Gura’s left eye twitched. The snoring stuttered, but he remained firmly in the land of dreams.

"Statistically," Riva murmured, his breath warm against Gura’s ear, "the chances of you getting a breakfast burrito drop to zero every second you remain in this state of hibernation."

Riva decided on a more direct approach. He reached out and gently pinched the tip of Gura’s nose, while simultaneously running his other hand through Gura’s thick, messy hair.

"Wake up, you gluttonous shark," Riva whispered, his tone softening into something deeply private. "The world is waiting to be annoyed, and I can't very well do it without my muscle."

Gura let out a low, rumbling groan. He blinked his eyes open, the golden light of his gaze slowly focusing on the elegant, violet-clad man hovering over him. "Riva?" Gura’s voice was a gravelly, sleep-thickened growl. "Is... is the pancake festival over?"

"Not yet," Riva smiled, leaning down to press a quick, grounding kiss to Gura’s forehead. "But if you don't move your arm, Regina is going to wake up and start a riot."

Gura grunted, finally shifting his weight and pulling Riva down into a sudden, crushing hug. "Five more minutes," Gura muffled into Riva’s shoulder, his grip like iron. "You’re too warm to let go of yet."

Riva huffed, his face flushing a light violet, but he didn't pull away. He settled into the embrace, the 2026 morning air still cold outside their blanket fortress. "You are an impossible creature, Gura. But fine. Five minutes. Then we hunt for breakfast."

Loot let out a supportive skree from the pillows, and for five glorious, quiet minutes, the Shark Squad was content to let the world stay un-conquered.

&

The January morning in the Shadow Realm was silent and cold on Saturday, January 17, 2026. Inside the royal quarters, Riva was still buried deep beneath a mountain of velvet blankets and silk pillows, his purple shark onesie barely visible. To anyone else, he looked like a peaceful, elegant sleeper, but Gura knew the truth: Riva was a nightmare to wake up before his internal clock hit the hour of ten.

Gura, however, had been awake for twenty minutes. His stomach had let out a roar that rivaled a Distain, and the thought of the Port Huron Winter Pancake Festival was currently the only thing on his mind.

"Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that usually made the floorboards shake. He poked a massive, grey-fleece finger into the bundle of blankets. "Riva, get up. The humans are already flipping the flapjacks. I can feel it in my soul."

The bundle didn't move. A muffled, aristocratic voice drifted from the pillows. "Statistically, Gura, the pancakes will be just as fluffy in sixty minutes. Go back to sleep or I shall have you turned into a decorative rug."

Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the dim violet light. He knew Riva’s weaknesses. He leaned over, his massive frame casting a shadow over the "refined strategist," and began to nuzzle his nose against Riva’s ear, his stubble grazing the sensitive skin.

"I’ll eat yours," Gura whispered, his breath warm and smelling faintly of the

cinnamon donuts he’d snuck at midnight. "I’ll eat the blueberry ones, and the chocolate chip ones, and I’ll tell Regina you said she could have your silk scarf to use as a leash for Loot."

Riva’s eyes snapped open. He sat up with a suddenness that nearly sent Gura off the bed. "You wouldn't dare. That scarf is hand-woven spider-silk from the Northern Void!"

"He’s awake!" Gura cheered, letting out a deep, booming laugh that finally woke Regina at the foot of the bed.

Riva blinked, his hair a magnificent, violet disaster and his monocle nowhere to be found. He looked at Gura, who was looking back at him with such genuine, hungry excitement that Riva’s irritation immediately evaporated.

"You are a brute, Gura," Riva sighed, though he reached out and affectionately tugged on the shark-fin of Gura’s hood. "A loud, gluttonous, persistent brute."

"Yeah," Gura smiled, leaning in to press a firm, sleep-warm kiss to Riva’s cheek. "But I'm the brute who found your top hat under the bed. Now get dressed. The Shark Squad is hungry."

Loot let out a celebratory skree and landed on Riva’s shoulder. By 10:15 AM on this 2026 Saturday, the Shadow Realm’s finest were officially on the hunt for breakfast.

&

It was late in the evening on January 16, 2026, and while the human world had long since packed away its tinsel, the Shark Squad was technically celebrating "Mercenare Christmas"—which occurred whenever Regina decided she hadn't received enough tribute.

"The color palette of this holiday is acceptable, but the lack of shark-themed decorations in the human world is a statistical tragedy," Riva remarked. He was meticulously hanging violet ornaments on a black pine tree, wearing his signature purple shark onesie with a sprig of holly pinned to the fin.

"Who cares about the tree? Look at the haul!" Gura roared, sitting in a pile of torn wrapping paper. He was wearing a Santa hat stretched precariously over his grey shark hood. He had already unwrapped a five-pound wheel of artisanal cheese and a "World’s Most Dangerous Shark" coffee mug.

Regina sat on her velvet throne, surrounded by boxes of high-end chocolates and a new red-and-black cape. "Loot! Stop trying to eat the string lights! They aren't glowing worms!"

Loot the bat was currently a blurred streak of brown fur, chasing a stray piece of ribbon through the air. He landed on the star atop the tree, letting out a triumphant

skree that sent a shower of artificial snow onto Riva’s head.

"Gura," Riva sighed, wiping the fake snow from his monocle. "Could you please restrain our flying gremlin before he topples the structural integrity of the holiday?"

Gura let out a deep, rumbling laugh and reached up, plucked Loot from the air, and tucked him into the warm pocket of his onesie. "He’s just excited, Riva. It’s 2026! We’ve survived another year of glitter-attacks. That deserves a celebration."

Gura stood up and pulled a small, velvet box from behind his back, handing it to Riva with a rare, shy look on his face. "Found this in that fancy shop in Port Huron. Thought it looked... you-ish."

Riva opened the box to find a silver monocle chain encrusted with tiny, sapphire-colored sharks. For a moment, the "theatrical strategist" was speechless. He looked up at Gura, his eyes softening behind his glasses.

"It is... statistically perfect," Riva whispered. He reached up, pulling Gura down by his shark-hood for a firm, lingering kiss that tasted like the peppermint bark they’d been snacking on all night.

"Ew! No kissing during gift-opening!" Regina shouted, though she was smiling as she popped a truffle into her mouth.

As the 2026 winter wind howled outside the palace, the Shark Squad huddled together by the fire—a princess, two monsters, and a bat, all perfectly content with their unconventional, shark-filled Christmas.

&

The clock on the stolen human television in the Splendorius palace ticked toward 11:59 PM on this Friday, January 16, 2026. While the human world had celebrated the new year weeks ago, Regina had decreed that the "Mercenare New Year" would occur tonight, purely because she liked the aesthetic of the January frost against the palace’s black stone.

"Ten seconds! Start the countdown or I’ll turn the champagne into vinegar!" Regina commanded, standing atop a velvet ottoman. She was wearing her red-and-black shark onesie, her blonde hair tied back with a glittery silver ribbon.

Riva adjusted his purple shark hood, checking his silver pocket watch with theatrical precision. "Five... four... three..."

"Two... one!" Gura roared, his voice echoing off the vaulted ceilings.

"SHARK YEAR!" they all shouted in unison.

Loot the bat let out a high-pitched skree, dive-bombing a bowl of grapes as the

screen showed the 2026 celebrations still lingering in human memories.

Gura popped the cork on a bottle of sparkling cider, the foam spilling over his grey fleece paws. He handed a glass to Riva, their fingers brushing in a lingering, warm touch. "To another year of being the biggest predators in the sea, Riva."

Riva smiled, clinking his glass against Gura’s. "And to another year of surviving your appetite. Statistically, it's our greatest challenge of 2026."

Regina flopped back into the pile of pillows, clutching a giant stuffed shark. "Next year, we’re taking over the world. But tonight, I want more of those little sausages Gura made."

Gura laughed, a deep, rumbling sound that made Riva feel more at home than any kingdom ever could. He leaned in, pressing a soft, cider-sweet kiss to Riva’s temple. "Happy Shark Year, Riva."

"Happy Shark Year, Gura," Riva whispered, leaning his head against the big man's shoulder.

As the first hour of January 17, 2026, began, the Shark Squad huddled together—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—ready to face whatever glittery nonsense the new year had in store, as long as they faced it together.

&

In the Shadow Realm, the concept of "love" was usually treated as a tactical weakness, but by February 14, 2026, the Shark Squad had long since rewritten the rules.

"The saturation of pink in the human world today is statistically offensive," Riva remarked, though he was currently busy piping dark chocolate ganache into heart-shaped macarons. He was dressed in his signature purple shark onesie, with a small, crimson silk heart pinned precisely over his own chest.

"I don't care about the pink, I care about the tribute!" Regina declared, sitting atop a mountain of plush sharks and boxes of high-end truffles. She was wearing her red shark hood, currently using her dark energy to make a dozen red roses float in a synchronized dance. "Loot! Stop chewing on the lace! That’s for my royal gift basket!"

Loot the bat let out a defiant skree and flew off with a strand of red ribbon trailing behind him like a kite tail. He landed on Gura’s head, who was currently occupied with a much larger task.

Gura was sitting on the floor, surrounded by butcher paper and a bucket of fried chicken wings he’d arranged in the shape of a massive heart. "Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration. "Come here. I made you something. It’s...

symbolic."

Riva set down his whisk and stepped over, peering at the meat-heart. "A gesture of gluttony and devotion. How... quintessentially you, Gura."

Gura didn't just offer the food. He reached into the pocket of his grey shark onesie and pulled out a small, heavy box. Inside was a silver charm for Riva’s cane—a tiny, amethyst-encrusted shark holding a heart in its jaws.

"I saw it in that shop in Port Huron," Gura muttered, his face flushing a rare, deep red. "It reminded me of... well, you know. How you're always bossing me around but you don't actually leave."

Riva felt a surge of warmth that had nothing to do with the palace heaters. He reached out, his gloved hand cupping Gura’s jaw, and pulled the big man down for a firm, lingering kiss that tasted like chocolate and cinnamon. "It is statistically the most sentimental thing I have ever owned, Gura. Thank you."

"Gross! If you two start doing that 'sharing-a-noodle' thing again, I’m calling the Glitter Force!" Regina shouted, though she was secretly tucking a Valentine’s card Gura had made for her (mostly drawings of steak and crowns) into her treasure chest.

Loot fluttered down and landed between Riva and Gura, letting out a contented chirp as he was offered a piece of strawberry.

As the 2026 February wind howled outside the black stone walls, the Shark Squad huddled together—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. In a world built on shadows, they had found the only light that mattered, wrapped in fleece and smelling like chocolate.

&

The Port Huron midway was a neon-drenched blur of whirling lights and the heavy, sweet scent of deep-fried everything. It was the night of Friday, January 16, 2026, and the Shark Squad was currently "undercover" at the Winter Carnival.

"Statistically, these games are rigged to favor the house by a margin of seventy-eight percent," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood. He looked down at his gloved hands, which were currently occupied with a giant cone of blue cotton candy. "It is an affront to my sense of logic."

"Logic doesn't win the giant plushies, Riva! Violence does!" Regina shouted, pointing a gloved finger at the 'Test Your Strength' bell. She was wearing her red shark onesie, her blonde hair flying as she dragged Gura toward the mallet. "Gura! Hit it until the bell breaks! I want that three-foot-tall shark on the top shelf!"

Gura, looking massive in his grey shark fleece, let out a booming laugh. "Princess, I

could hit that thing into the next time zone." He handed a bag of hot donuts to Riva, who held them with a look of long-suffering affection.

In Gura’s deep pocket, Loot the bat was vibrating with pure adrenaline. He poked his nose out, his onyx eyes reflecting the spinning Ferris wheel. Gura reached in and fed the bat a single, sugar-coated popcorn kernel. Loot let out a muffled skree of triumph.

Gura grabbed the mallet, his muscles rippling under the grey polyester. With a roar that made the nearby humans jump, he slammed it down. The metal puck shot upward so fast it didn't just ring the bell—it shattered the lightbulb at the top.

"WINNER!" the terrified carny squeaked, handing Regina the giant shark before Gura could ask for seconds.

"See? Tactical superiority," Regina smirked, hugging the massive plush.

As the 2026 Michigan wind began to pick up, the squad moved toward the Ferris wheel. They claimed a gondola to themselves, the four of them squeezed into the small space. As they rose above the park, the lights of Port Huron and the Blue Water Bridge stretched out beneath them like a carpet of diamonds.

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the cotton candy melting on his tongue. "I suppose... the carnival has its charms," he murmured.

Gura wrapped a massive arm around Riva and Regina, pulling them closer to his heat. "Best night of 2026 so far," Gura rumbled, leaning down to press a quick, sugar-sweet kiss to Riva’s temple.

Loot crawled out of the pocket and perched on the railing of the gondola, his wings unfurled as they reached the apex of the ride. For a moment, suspended between the stars and the carnival lights, the Shark Squad wasn't a group of villains. They were just a family, perfectly content in their own private circle of the dark.

&

In the cold, echoing halls of the Splendorius palace, a new sound had begun to haunt the Mercenare generals. It wasn't the sound of Glitter Heart’s victory speech; it was a rhythmic, high-pitched melody coming from a bright pink tablet Regina had "liberated" from the human world.

"Baby shark, doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo..."

Riva was leaning against a black marble pillar, his forehead resting against the cool stone. "Regina, I am a creature of high art and sophisticated terror. If I hear that repetitive acoustic nightmare one more time, I may actually dissolve into negative energy."

"It’s educational!" Regina shouted, perched on her throne. She was wearing her red shark onesie, her blonde hair flying as she did a choreographed hand-dance. "Loot loves it! Don't you, Loot?"

Loot the bat was currently hanging from Regina’s crown, vibrating his wings in perfect time to the beat. He let out a supportive skree-doo-doo-doo that sent Riva into a fresh wave of despair.

Gura waddled into the room, his grey shark onesie unzipped to his navel to reveal a stained "I Love Steak" t-shirt. He was carrying a massive bucket of popcorn. "What’s the problem, Riva? It’s got a good beat. It’s... catchy."

"Catchy? It is a psychological weapon!" Riva snapped, adjusting his monocle with a trembling hand. "It is Friday night, January 16, 2026. We should be plotting the downfall of the human world, not singing about a multi-generational family of aquatic predators!"

"Mommy shark, doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo..."

Gura started nodding his head. Then his shoulders started to shimmy. Before Riva could protest, Gura’s massive frame was moving in a rhythmic, shark-like shuffle. "Daddy shark, doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo!" Gura roared, his deep voice harmonizing with the high-pitched tablet.

"Gura, no! Not you too!" Riva cried.

"Come on, Riva!" Regina jumped off her throne, grabbing Riva’s hand. "You're the Purple Shark! You have to do the 'Grandpa Shark' part because you're the oldest and crankiest!"

"I am not Grandpa Shark—"

But Gura had already scooped Riva up into a massive, one-armed hug, pinning him against his warm, grey fleece side. "Grandpa shark, doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo!" Gura sang, his eyes bright with a rare, goofy joy as he swayed Riva back and forth.

Riva looked at Gura’s grinning face, then at Regina’s delighted laughter, and finally at Loot, who was now doing tiny "shark-fin" flaps with his wings. The "Shark Squad" was in full, ridiculous effect in 2026.

Riva let out a long, defeated sigh. "Fine. But I am performing the choreography with theatrical flair."

Riva straightened his back, extended his cane, and with a flourish that would have made a Broadway star weep, joined in. "Grandpa shark, doo-doo, doo-doo-doo-doo!"

By midnight, the most feared villains in the Shadow Realm were collapsed in a heap on the velvet rug, breathless and giggling, as the tablet finally ran out of battery.

"Best... song... ever," Gura panted, leaning his head on Riva’s shoulder.

"If anyone speaks of this," Riva whispered, closing his eyes as he tucked Loot into his silk scarf, "I will deny it with every fiber of my being."

"Doo-doo-doo," Regina whispered in her sleep, and for once, the palace was perfectly, shark-fully at peace.

&

The January mist hung thick over the Port Huron shoreline on this Saturday morning, January 17, 2026. The Shark Squad was currently loitering near the Blue Water Bridge, looking less like a threat to the multiverse and more like a very strange, very coordinated pajamas-themed street performance.

"If we are here to 'meet' royalty, Regina, I must insist that Gura wipes the maple syrup from his chin," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood. "It is statistically impossible to project an aura of menace when one smells like a breakfast buffet."

"Shut up, Riva! She’s coming!" Regina whispered, standing on her tiptoes.

Walking toward them through the fog was Princess Marie Angelica (Princess Anne). She looked radiant, her magical aura glowing softly against the 32°F Michigan air. She stopped ten feet away, her eyes widening as she took in the sight: a blonde girl in a red shark suit, a slender man in a purple shark suit, and a massive, hulking brute in a grey shark suit holding a tiny bat.

"Regina?" the Princess asked, her voice melodic and confused. "And... the Mercenare generals? Why are you all dressed as... predators of the deep?"

"We are the Shark Squad, Princess!" Regina declared, striking a pose. "And this is Loot. He’s our tactical aerial specialist."

Loot let out a polite skree from Gura’s shoulder, his tiny shark hoodie tailored perfectly by Riva to match the group.

Gura stepped forward, his heavy boots crunching on the frost. He reached into the pocket of his grey fleece onesie and pulled out a slightly crumpled, but still warm, cinnamon roll. "Here. The Princess of the Shadow Realm said we had to bring a peace offering. This is the best thing I’ve found in Port Huron so far."

Princess Marie Angelica blinked, looking at the cinnamon roll, then at the "Shark Squad." She saw the way Riva was standing protectively close to Gura, and the way Regina looked—for the first time—like she actually belonged to a family.

The Princess reached out and took the pastry, a soft smile breaking across her face. "It is... a very thoughtful gesture. Thank you, Gura."

"See?" Regina smirked at Riva. "I told you she’d be impressed by our 'underwater' aesthetic."

Riva straightened his monocle, a rare, genuine look of relief crossing his face. "Indeed. It seems the 2026 cultural climate is more accepting of aquatic-themed villainy than I had initially calculated."

"Does this mean we can go get more pancakes now?" Gura rumbled, his stomach letting out a roar that made the Princess giggle.

"Yes, Gura," Riva sighed, reaching out to take Gura’s hand. "Let’s go. Princess, it has been... an educational encounter. Stay warm."

As the Shark Squad turned and waddled back toward the 2026 Winter Pancake Festival, Princess Marie Angelica watched them go. She took a bite of the cinnamon roll, watching a purple shark, a grey shark, and a red shark vanish into the Michigan mist, unified by a bond that even the Shadow Realm couldn't break.

&

In the quiet of the Splendorius royal suite, the Shark Squad was huddled around a glowing crystal orb. It was just past midnight on Saturday, January 17, 2026, and the evening had turned nostalgic.

"If we are to be a proper 'Squad,' we must document our origins," Riva declared, wearing his purple shark onesie. He tapped the crystal, and a flickering image appeared. "Behold: a young Riva, moments after my first successful plot to steal the moonlight."

The image showed a tiny, spindly boy in a miniature velvet cape, holding a magnifying glass and looking deeply offended by everything.

"You were so skinny!" Gura roared, his grey shark hood shaking with laughter. "You look like a purple toothpick with an attitude problem."

"I was scrawny, but intellectually superior," Riva sniffed. "Now, Gura, show us the 'Baby Brute' archives. I know they exist."

Gura grunted, tapping the crystal. The image shifted to a toddler Gura—or rather, a toddler-sized stomach with limbs attached. The young Gura was sitting in the middle of a destroyed pantry, a whole ham in one hand and a look of pure, unadulterated triumph on his face.

"Look at those cheeks!" Regina giggled, poking Gura’s side. "You were just a big, hungry potato!"

"I was a predator-in-training," Gura corrected, though he looked at the image with a rare, soft smile. "And look at this one—my first time biting a hole through a shield."

Next was Regina. She tapped the crystal with a flourish, revealing a tiny girl in a dress of crimson silk, sitting on a throne that was far too large for her. She had a toy sword in one hand and a look of absolute, terrifying determination.

"I was the cutest ruler in the history of the Shadow Realm," Regina stated as a fact.

"You were a menace even then," Riva murmured affectionately, pulling the princess closer.

Finally, they looked at Loot. Because he was a bat, his "baby photos" were mostly blurry images of a fuzzy, brown bean-shaped creature hanging upside down from a mango tree.

"He hasn't changed at all," Gura whispered.

Loot let out a soft skree and landed on the crystal, his wings reflecting the images of their pasts.

"We were all so... separate back then," Riva observed, his voice dropping into a quiet, 2026-weary tone. He reached out, his hand finding Gura’s under the duvet. "Statistically, the probability of us ending up in matching shark pajamas in a palace bedroom was less than one percent."

"The best one percent ever," Gura rumbled, pulling the whole Squad into a crushing, fleece-covered hug.

As the images faded, the Shark Squad settled into sleep—a toothpick, a potato, a princess, and a bean—finally and completely together.

&

The violet lightning of the Shadow Realm flickered outside the stone windows on this Saturday morning, January 17, 2026, but inside Riva’s quarters, the air was thick with a different kind of tension.

Riva was pacing the length of the rug, his purple shark onesie unzipped at the collar. His fingers were flying in a frantic, rhythmic tapping against his own forearms. "The calculations are failing, Gura. The Glitter Force’s 2026 upgrades are statistically nonsensical! They’re winning through sheer, unadulterated optimism, and I—I can’t find the variable to break it!"

Gura stood by the bed, watching the "theatrical strategist" spiral into a rare, high-anxiety frenzy. He didn't use words; he knew Riva’s mind was currently a beehive of buzzing thoughts that logic couldn't quiet. Instead, Gura simply stepped into Riva's path, a massive wall of grey fleece.

Riva bumped into Gura’s chest and stopped, his breath coming in shallow hitches. "Gura, I’m busy. I have to—"

"You have to breathe," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, grounding frequency that seemed to vibrate through Riva's bones.

Gura reached out, his large, calloused hands coming to rest on Riva’s shoulders. He applied a steady, firm pressure, literalizing the concept of an anchor. He then moved his hands upward, his thumbs finding the tight, knotted muscles at the base of Riva’s neck.

"Close your eyes, Riva," Gura commanded softly.

Riva resisted for a second, his monocle slipping, before he finally let out a long, shuddering sigh. He leaned his forehead against Gura’s chest, his eyes fluttering shut. Gura began a slow, rhythmic massage, his thumbs kneading away the stress of a thousand failed plots.

"There's no Glitter Force in here," Gura whispered, his breath warm against the top of Riva’s head. "No King. No 2026 deadlines. Just the shark squad."

Riva’s tapping fingers finally went still. He reached up, his hands clutching the soft grey fleece of Gura’s sleeves. The physical contact—the sheer, immovable weight of Gura’s presence—began to drown out the noise in his head.

"I feel... statistically quieter," Riva murmured, his body finally going limp against Gura.

Gura shifted his grip, pulling Riva into a crushing, protective hug. He tucked Riva’s head under his chin and simply held him, swaying slightly from side to side in a slow, hypnotic motion.

Loot the bat, sensing the shift in the room, fluttered down from the rafters and landed softly on the heap of purple and grey. He let out a tiny, comforting skree and began to nuzzle into Riva’s neck.

"See?" Gura whispered. "Even the thief knows you need to shut down for a bit."

Riva didn't answer. He didn't need to. He just let the stress of being a villain in 2026 melt away into the warmth of the only man who could ever make the world stop spinning. In the center of the Shadow Realm, the Shark Squad was finally, peacefully, silent.

&

The January chill had seeped through the black marble walls of the Splendorius palace on this Saturday morning, January 17, 2026. Inside the royal kitchen, the air was thick with the savory, herbal steam of a "Shark Squad" recovery project.

"Statistically, the salt-to-broth ratio is the only thing standing between us and a collective cold," Riva remarked. He was meticulously skimming the surface of a

massive copper pot, wearing his purple shark onesie with a silk chef's toque perched over his shark fin.

Regina sat on the counter, her red shark hood pulled up, wrapped in a fuzzy blanket. "It needs more noodles! And those little crackers that look like fish! If I’m going to be forced to eat liquid food, it had better be entertaining."

Gura was the "human" stove, leaning his massive, grey-fleece frame against the counter as he stirred a secondary pot of thick, chunky stew. "I put extra steak in mine," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration. "Soup is just a drink unless there’s something you have to chew."

Loot the bat was perched on Gura's shoulder, his tiny onyx eyes fixed on a bowl of sliced carrots. Gura reached up and offered a softened piece from his wooden spoon. Loot let out a grateful skree and began to nibble, his tiny shark-hoodie sleeves dusted with flour.

"Careful, Gura," Riva warned, though his eyes softened as he watched the brute. "If you make the stew too thick, it will become a gravitational anomaly."

"It’s perfect," Gura insisted. He scooped up a spoonful and held it out to Riva. "Taste."

Riva leaned in, his monocle fogging over from the steam. He took a sip, the warmth of the broth and the richness of the seasoned meat blooming across his palate. "Hmm. I must admit... the flavor profile is surprisingly sophisticated for a man who usually eats things whole."

Gura grinned, the shark-teeth of his hood casting a playful shadow over his face. He leaned in and gave Riva a quick, soup-flavored kiss on the cheek. "See? I’m a culinary predator."

The four of them huddled around the small kitchen table, the palace's 2026 winter draft forgotten. They dipped crusty bread into the pots, the rhythmic clinking of spoons the only sound in the room. Loot eventually fell asleep in a small bowl of discarded vegetable peelings, his belly full and warm.

"Best soup ever," Regina murmured, her eyes drooping as the steam worked its magic.

Riva reached over and took Gura's hand under the table, their fingers interlocking amidst the scattered crumbs. "A successful recipe, Gura," Riva whispered.

"The best," Gura agreed, pulling Riva close as the January morning settled around them in a warm, savory haze.

&

The Port Huron Winter Festival was in full swing this Saturday afternoon, January 17, 2026. The air was a biting 34°F, but inside the heated "Mega-Tent," the atmosphere was sweltering. The main event was about to begin: The 2026 Blue Water Bridge Slider Slams.

"I have calculated the volume of the human stomach versus the dimensions of these miniature burgers," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood. "Statistically, the average human will hit 'The Wall' at twelve sliders. You, Gura, have an unfair biological advantage."

"It’s not unfair, it’s a gift!" Gura roared, cracking his knuckles. He was sitting at the long wooden table, his grey shark onesie standing out among the locals in their heavy Carhartt jackets.

Regina sat on the bench next to him, wearing her red shark hood and holding a stopwatch. "If you don't win this, Gura, I'm making you eat nothing but kale for a week. Loot, give him the signal!"

Loot the bat, perched on a stack of napkins, let out a high-pitched, piercing skree just as the buzzer sounded.

The contest was a blur of grease and glory. While the human contestants were meticulously dipping their buns in water to swallow faster, Gura was a force of nature. He wasn't just eating; he was a shark in a feeding frenzy.

"Twenty! Twenty-five! He’s outpacing the local high school football team!" the announcer shouted over the 2026 pop music blaring through the speakers.

Riva leaned in, his theatrical composure slipping into genuine excitement. "Gura, watch the pickles! They’re a choking hazard! Maintain your chew-to-swallow ratio!"

Gura gave a thumbs-up, his cheeks bulging like a squirrel’s, and slammed down his thirtieth slider. Beside him, the reigning champion of Port Huron looked pale, slowly pushing his plate away in defeat.

As the final buzzer echoed through the tent, Gura let out a triumphant belch that actually made the napkins on the table flutter.

"THE WINNER!" Regina shrieked, jumping onto the bench. "Sixty-two sliders! A new 2026 Michigan record!"

The crowd cheered, half-horrified and half-impressed, as the "Shark Squad" was presented with a giant trophy shaped like a golden burger. Gura stood up, looking slightly more rounded than usual, and draped a massive arm over Riva’s shoulders.

"I think... I think I need a nap," Gura rumbled, his voice thick with beef and victory.

Riva smiled, reaching up to wipe a stray bit of onion from Gura’s shark-fleece

sleeve. "You did well, my gluttonous king. Statistically, you are now seventy percent slider."

Loot fluttered up and landed on the golden burger trophy, letting out a satisfied chirp. As the Squad waddled back toward the 32°F January air, Gura leaned his head against Riva’s.

"Best lunch ever," Gura muffled.

"Indeed," Riva whispered, squeezing Gura’s hand. "Now, let’s go find a place for you to hibernate before you explode."

&

The Port Huron Olive Garden was bustling on this Saturday afternoon, January 17, 2026. The atmosphere was thick with the scent of garlic and the frantic energy of weekend shoppers, but the "Shark Squad" was only focused on one thing: the promise of "Never-Ending" breadsticks.

"I have analyzed the business model," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood. "The term 'never-ending' is a statistical fallacy designed to lure in the weak-willed. Eventually, the kitchen must close, or the supply of flour must fail."

"They haven't met me yet," Gura rumbled, his grey shark onesie taking up a significant portion of the waiting area. "I’m the Variable that breaks the equation, Riva."

Regina tapped her foot, her red shark hood pulled up as she glared at the host. "If we aren't seated in the next thirty seconds, I’m going to turn that salad bar into a crater. Loot, tell them how hungry we are!"

Loot, tucked into the pocket of Gura’s fleece, let out a sharp, supportive skree.

Finally, they were led to a corner booth. The server looked at the three adults in shark pajamas and a bat and decided that, for $2.13 an hour plus tips, it wasn't worth asking questions.

The breadsticks arrived.

Gura didn't just eat them; he inhaled them. He was a blurred streak of grey fleece and garlic salt. "Ten," he counted, his voice muffled by dough. "Fifteen. Riva, these are better than the ones we found in the Shadow Realm dumpster."

"That is a low bar to clear, Gura," Riva sighed, though he was meticulously dipping his own breadstick into a cup of Alfredo sauce with surgical precision. He reached over and wiped a dusting of crumbs from Gura’s lip. "Maintain some dignity. We are villains, not vacuum cleaners."

Regina was busy using the breadsticks to build a fortress around her bowl of soup. "I’m the Queen of Carb-Castle! Loot, you’re the dragon!"

Loot flew up and perched on the edge of a breadstick "tower," letting out a triumphant chirp before nibbling on a stray piece of parsley.

By the time the actual entrees arrived, the server was visibly sweating. Gura had consumed forty-two breadsticks and was currently staring down a plate of Tour of Italy as if it were a mortal enemy.

"I... I think I've reached the 'Never-Ending' limit," Gura groaned twenty minutes later, leaning back against the vinyl booth. "Riva, I’m a full shark."

Riva smiled, a rare, genuine expression of warmth. He reached across the table and took Gura’s hand, their fingers interlocking amidst the scattered napkins. "Statistically, you are now ninety percent garlic butter. I find this... acceptable."

"Happy 2026," Gura muffled, leaning his head against Riva’s shoulder as the food coma began to set in.

"Indeed," Riva whispered, squeezing his hand. "Now, let’s get the Princess home before she realizes there’s a free-refill policy on the mints."

&

The Port Huron YMCA was relatively quiet on this Saturday afternoon, January 17, 2026, until the double doors swung open to reveal three adults in shark-themed fleece and a very confused fruit bat.

"According to my 2026 fitness projection, our current 'Shark Squad' metabolism is trending toward 'sedentary potato,'" Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood and a pair of vintage sweatbands. "Statistically, if we do not engage in cardiovascular activity, Gura will eventually become a gravitational singularity."

"I am not a singularity, I'm just well-insulated!" Gura roared, his grey shark onesie stretched tight over his broad shoulders. He looked at the row of treadmills as if they were torture devices designed by the Glitter Force.

Regina hopped onto a stationary bike, her red shark fin bobbing. "I’ll be the leader! I’m going to bike so fast I travel back to 2025! Loot, keep the pace!"

Loot the bat perched on the handlebars, his tiny wings flapping in a frantic, rhythmic beat. He let out a motivational skree every time Regina pedaled faster.

Riva directed Gura toward the heavy weights. "Observe, Gura. The 'Bench Press.' It is a test of raw power and theatrical form."

Gura sat on the bench, gripped the bar, and proceeded to lift the entire rack’s

maximum weight as if it were a toothpick. "Too light," Gura grunted, his face turning a healthy shade of Mercenare-violet. "Riva, sit on the bar. I need more 'strategic weight.'"

Riva sighed, but he elegantly perched himself on the end of the barbell, crossing his legs and adjusting his monocle. "Very well. Treat me as a metaphor for your responsibilities."

Gura began to lift, his muscles rippling under the grey fleece. With every rep, he looked up at Riva, a grin spreading across his face. "You're... lighter... than a... pancake!" Gura panted.

"Focus on your breathing, you brute," Riva murmured, though he couldn't help but reach down and pat Gura's damp forehead with a silk towel.

After thirty minutes of "Shark-robics," the squad was collapsed on the blue yoga mats near the window. The 34°F Michigan air pressed against the glass, but inside, they were radiating heat.

"I feel... statistically exhausted," Riva panted, his purple hood falling back to reveal his messy hair.

Gura reached over, his massive, sweaty arm pulling Riva into a crushing hug. "See? Exercise is just a way to make the post-workout snacks taste better."

Regina flopped down beside them, Loot curling up in the "mouth" of her red hood. "Next time, we're doing water aerobics. I want to see if Riva actually floats."

"I am a shark, Princess. I transcend buoyancy," Riva sniffed, though he leaned his head against Gura's shoulder and closed his eyes.

As the 2026 winter sun began to dip toward the horizon, the Shark Squad sat in the gym's quiet corner—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the burn in their muscles and the warmth of a family that worked out together.

&

In the velvet-draped dressing room of the Splendorius palace, the air was thick with the scent of lavender starch and the frantic energy of a "Shark Squad" aesthetic overhaul. It was Saturday afternoon, January 17, 2026, and Regina had decided that being a shark was no longer enough; they needed to be "Shark Aristocrats."

"If we are to project 2026-level authority, we must embrace the haute couture of the Shadow Realm!" Riva declared. He had shed his usual onesie for a bespoke, deep-plum tailcoat encrusted with amethyst shark-fin buttons. He looked in the mirror, adjusting a cravat that was so stiff it practically held his chin up for him.

Gura stood in the corner, looking deeply suspicious of the silver-threaded vest Riva

was trying to lace him into. "Riva, this thing is squeezing my ribs. How am I supposed to breathe, let alone eat a three-course meal?"

"Breathing is secondary to silhouette, Gura!" Riva snapped affectionately, pulling the laces tight. He stepped back to admire his work: Gura looked like a Victorian powerhouse, his massive frame poured into a charcoal-grey frock coat with fur-lined lapels. "Statistically, you are now ten percent more likely to be mistaken for a Duke."

"A Duke of Steak," Gura grunted, though he couldn't help but admire the way the silver embroidery caught the light. He reached down and plucked Loot from a pile of discarded ribbons.

Loot was the centerpiece of the transformation. Riva had spent the morning crafting a "Imperial Bat-Regalia." The fruit bat was now wearing a miniature velvet cape that matched Riva’s tailcoat, complete with a tiny, functioning gold monocle chain that looped around his left ear.

"He looks like a tiny, winged Emperor!" Regina squealed, spinning in front of the mirror. She had opted for a red-and-black ballgown with a skirt so voluminous it occupied three zip codes. "Loot, execute the Royal Flutter!"

Loot let out a dignified skree and did a slow, majestic loop around the room, the tiny cape billowing behind him like a shadow.

"Observe," Riva said, handing Gura a silver-topped cane shaped like a shark’s tooth. "The complete Squad. We are no longer just predators; we are the elite."

Gura looked at Riva—the way his monocle glittered and the way the purple silk made him look like royalty—and felt a surge of warmth that had nothing to do with the heavy coats. He reached out, his gloved hand catching Riva’s waist and pulling him into a slow, rhythmic sway.

"You look... incredible, Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency.

"And you look... statistically formidable," Riva whispered, leaning his head against Gura’s shoulder, the lace of his cravat tickling Gura’s chin.

"Enough with the slow-dancing!" Regina shouted, grabbing her scepter. "The 2026 winter gala starts in ten minutes, and I want to be the first one to the shrimp tower!"

As the Shark Squad marched toward the throne room—a Duke, a Strategist, a Princess, and an Emperor—the palace floors echoed with the sound of their high-fashion victory.

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The Splendorius Royal Ballroom was a cavern of obsidian and amethyst light on the evening of Saturday, January 17, 2026. This was the "2026 Winter Shadow Gala," and for the first time, the Shark Squad was the main attraction.

"Remember," Riva whispered, adjusting the amethyst cufflinks on his deep-plum tailcoat. "The goal is to project an image of effortless superiority. No shark-themed puns, no slurping the punch, and absolutely no biting the other guests, Gura."

Gura looked like a Victorian titan. His charcoal-grey frock coat was strained over his massive shoulders, and his fur-lined lapels brushed against his jaw. "I make no promises, Riva. If the shrimp tower is as big as Regina said, I’m going into a feeding frenzy."

Regina led the way, her red-and-black ballgown rustling against the marble. "Everyone look at me!" she commanded, her voice echoing. "The Shark Princess has arrived!"

Perched on her shoulder was Loot, the undisputed star of the night. The fruit bat was wearing his custom-made velvet cape and a miniature gold monocle chain. He let out a dignified skree as they entered the room, his wings performing a slow, rhythmic flutter that Riva had spent hours rehearsing with him.

The other Mercenare generals watched from the shadows. Bel looked particularly sour, his arms crossed over his chest. "Look at them," Bel hissed. "Dressing up like humans. It’s pathetic."

"It’s called 'style,' Bel. You should try it sometime," Riva remarked as he glided past, his silver-topped cane clicking rhythmically on the floor.

As the 2026 waltz began, the room slowed. Riva turned to Gura, offering a gloved hand. "Statistically, Gura, a dance is the most efficient way to demonstrate our unity."

Gura chuckled, his massive hand swallowing Riva’s. "I thought you’d never ask."

They moved to the center of the floor. It was a study in contrasts: Riva’s lithe, elegant movements against Gura’s powerful, grounding presence. As they spun, the tail of Riva’s coat flared out like a fin. Gura leaned down, his voice a low, private rumble against Riva’s ear. "You look beautiful tonight, Riva."

Riva’s face flushed a deep violet. "And you... you are a surprisingly capable lead, you brute."

In the corner, Regina was already at the shrimp tower, feeding Loot tiny pieces of cocktail fruit. "Go on, Loot! Eat the expensive stuff! We're royalty tonight!"

As the gala reached its peak, a streak of light flashed outside the high stone windows—the 2026 Winter Meteor Shower was beginning. The Shark Squad

gathered by the balcony, the light of falling stars reflecting in their eyes.

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the silk of his cravat brushing Gura’s frock coat. "A successful evening, Gura."

"The best," Gura agreed, pulling Riva closer. "Happy 2026, Shark Squad."

Loot chirped from the railing, his tiny cape billowing in the wind, as the four of them stood unified—a Duke, a Strategist, a Princess, and an Emperor—perfectly at home in the dark.

&

The violet moon of the Shadow Realm hung low over the palace on the afternoon of Saturday, January 17, 2026. Inside Riva’s private chambers, the atmosphere was a stark contrast to the usual cold, calculating malice of the Mercenare ranks. Today was a rare celebration of existence—the anniversary of the day Riva had first emerged into the shadows—and Gura had ensured the theater of war was replaced by a theater of devotion.

The room was bathed in the warm, golden flicker of dozens of thick beeswax candles. Riva sat on the edge of his bed, his signature plum-colored tailcoat discarded on a velvet chaise lounge. He wore only a thin silk shirt, the top buttons undone, his pale skin glowing in the candlelight.

"You've been pacing all day, Riva," Gura’s voice rumbled from the shadows. It wasn't the hungry roar of the battlefield; it was a low, grounding frequency that seemed to hum in Riva's very bones.

Gura stepped into the light. He had shed his heavy frock coat, appearing in a simple dark vest that emphasized the sheer breadth of his shoulders. He walked to where Riva sat and knelt between his knees, his massive hands coming to rest on Riva’s thighs with a gentleness that still, in 2026, felt like a miracle.

"Statistically," Riva whispered, his voice trembling slightly as he reached down to cup Gura’s jaw, "I should be focusing on the next ambush. But my mind... it refuses to cooperate."

"Good," Gura murmured. He leaned forward, pressing his forehead against Riva’s. The contact was a silent promise of safety. "Today isn't for the King. It’s for you. Only you."

Gura rose slowly, pulling Riva into a standing embrace. The physical difference between them was a study in elegance versus power, yet they fit together with a precision that defied logic. Gura’s hands moved to the small of Riva’s back, pulling him flush against the warmth of his chest.

When they finally moved together onto the bed, the world outside—the 34°F

Michigan-like chill of the palace and the looming threat of the Glitter Force—ceased to exist.

The lovemaking was slow, a rhythmic and deliberate exploration of everything they usually kept hidden. Gura was incredibly mindful of Riva’s frame, his large, calloused fingers tracing the delicate lines of Riva’s collarbone and the curve of his spine with the reverence of a devotee. Every touch was an unspoken birthday gift.

As the intensity built, a soft, breathless sound escaped Riva’s throat—a low moan that turned into a whispered plea for closeness. He looked up into Gura’s golden eyes, seeing a reflection of his own soul, stripped of all theatricality.

"Gura," Riva breathed, his fingers tangling in the big man's thick hair. "I... I love you. More than the shadows."

Gura froze for a heartbeat, his gaze softening into a look of profound, raw affection. He leaned down, his kiss landing softly on Riva’s lips, tasting of salt and absolute loyalty.

"I’ve got you, Riva," Gura whispered against his skin, his voice thick with a 2026-weary but unwavering devotion. "I love you. Happy birthday, my shark."

In the sanctuary of the dark, the two villains found a peace that no conquest could ever provide. They weren't fighting for a crown; they were simply two souls, finally and completely home in each other's arms.

&

In the corner of the Splendorius royal suite, behind a curtain of purple velvet, lay the "Shark Squad’s" most guarded treasure. It wasn't a collection of stolen hearts or dark energy crystals—it was a literal mountain of plushies, figurines, and aquatic memorabilia.

"The inventory is currently at an all-time high," Riva remarked, adjusting his monocle as he stood before the hoard on this Saturday evening, January 17, 2026. He was dressed in his signature purple shark onesie, holding a clipboard. "Statistically, we have reached maximum shark-capacity."

Regina was currently face-down in the center of the pile, a sea of red-and-black felt. "There’s no such thing as maximum! I found a limited-edition '2026 Winter Great White' on the human internet, and I want it!"

Gura was sitting on the floor, meticulously dusting a row of hand-painted shark figurines. He looked like a giant grey bear in his shark onesie, his massive hands surprisingly delicate as he moved a ceramic hammerhead. "This one’s my favorite," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency. "It looks like the one Riva won for me at the Port Huron carnival last year."

Loot the bat was the self-appointed guardian of the collection. He had built a small nest out of a discarded "Shark Week" t-shirt at the very top of the pile. He let out a sharp, territorial skree as Riva reached for a plushie to inspect its stitching.

"Patience, Loot. I am merely ensuring quality control," Riva sighed. He looked at Gura, who was currently trying to fit a tiny, hand-knitted purple scarf onto a plastic bull shark. "Gura, why is that predator wearing winter attire?"

"Because it’s January in 2026, Riva," Gura grunted, looking up with a grin. "And you said sharks need to be 'aristocratic.' Even the little ones."

Riva’s face flushed a deep violet. He walked over and sat beside Gura, leaning his head against the big man’s shoulder. "Your dedication to the theme is... statistically impressive."

Regina emerged from the plushie-pile, holding a shark that was nearly as big as she was. "Look! This one has a pocket for snacks!" She immediately stuffed a handful of gummy fish into the shark's mouth. "Loot, execute the snack-retrieval mission!"

Loot dived from his nest, snatched a gummy fish, and did a victory lap around the room, his wings brushing the chandeliers.

As the 2026 winter night settled over the palace, the Shark Squad sat among their treasures. They were surrounded by foam teeth and polyester fins—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by a collection that proved that even in the Shadow Realm, some things were worth holding onto.

"Riva?" Gura murmured, wrapping a massive arm around him.

"Yes, Gura?"

"I think we need a bigger room."

Riva smiled, closing his eyes. "Indeed. But only if it has a better heater."

&

The Birchwood Mall in Port Huron was buzzing with the energy of a mid-January weekend. It was Saturday, January 17, 2026, and the outside temperature had dropped to a biting 28°F, making the heated corridors of the mall a tactical necessity for the Shark Squad.

"I find the architectural layout of this 'shopping center' to be a statistical labyrinth designed to induce consumer fatigue," Riva remarked. He was draped in his signature purple shark onesie, his top hat replaced by a matching violet beanie, and his eyes shielded by oversized designer sunglasses.

"Stop being a nerd and look at that!" Regina shouted, pointing toward a storefront

with a massive neon sign. She was wearing her red shark hood, her blonde hair flying as she dragged Gura toward a store called The Shark Cave. "It’s a sign from the universe! Or at least from 2026!"

Gura, looking like a grey-fleece mountain, let out a deep, rumbling laugh. "Princess, if they have a food court in there, I’m in." He was carrying a large pretzel in one hand and a giant cup of "Shark-Blue" lemonade in the other.

In his breast pocket, Loot the bat was vibrating with pure adrenaline. He poked his nose out, his onyx eyes reflecting the bright mall lights. Riva reached in and discreetly offered the bat a tiny piece of salt-pretzel. Loot let out a muffled skree of triumph, his tiny shark-hoodie sleeves fluttering.

The squad’s first stop was a photo booth near the fountain.

"Everyone in!" Regina commanded, shoving them into the small cubicle.

The flash went off four times. The first photo showed Gura trying to fit his massive frame into the frame; the second showed Riva looking deeply offended by a strand of Gura’s grey fleece in his mouth; the third showed Loot flying toward the lens; and the fourth—the one Riva would secretly keep in his pocket—showed Gura leaning down to press a quick, cinnamon-scented kiss to Riva’s temple while Regina made a "shark-bite" face at the camera.

"A successful documentation of our 2026 winter campaign," Riva murmured, looking at the printed strip.

"Next stop, the food court!" Gura roared, his stomach letting out a growl that made a nearby security guard pause. "I heard there’s a place that serves 'Great White' tacos."

As the Shark Squad waddled through the mall—a purple shark, a grey shark, and a red shark—the humans gave them a wide berth. In Port Huron, a town used to quirky winter festivals, the three of them were just another part of the January landscape.

Riva reached out and took Gura’s hand as they passed the fountain, their fingers locking together in the cool mall air. "I suppose," Riva whispered, "that the 2026 human world has its charms."

"Only 'cause you're in it," Gura grunted, squeezing his hand back.

Loot chirped from the pocket, and for a few hours, the Shadow Realm was a million miles away, replaced by the scent of cinnabon and the warmth of a family that shopped together.

&

The Port Huron Dental Center was a place of sterile white walls and the high-pitched whine of drills—sounds that Riva usually associated with a well-executed torture chamber. However, on this Saturday afternoon, January 17, 2026, the Shark Squad was there for a much more mundane reason: Gura had tried to eat a "diamond-crusted" decorative jawbreaker at the Winter Festival, and the jawbreaker had won.

"Statistically, Gura, your teeth are designed to rend the armor of a Glitter Warrior, not to process compressed industrial sugar," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood. He looked deeply out of place in the waiting room, holding a clipboard and wearing his signature designer sunglasses to shield his eyes from the fluorescent lights.

"It looked like a challenge, Riva!" Gura muffled, his jaw swollen to the size of a grapefruit under his grey shark fleece. "A predator never backs down from a shiny snack."

Regina was currently spinning in a hydraulic chair she had "commandeered" in the corner. "If they hurt him, I'm going to turn this office into a crater. Loot, keep a lookout for the 'Doctor' person. If they approach with a needle, bite them!"

Loot the bat, perched on the headrest of Regina's chair, let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his miniature shark hoodie, looking like a tiny, winged dental assistant.

"Mr... Gula?" a terrified dental hygienist called out, peering at the massive man in the grey pajamas.

Riva stood up, his silver-topped cane clicking on the linoleum. "That would be 'General Gura' to you. And I shall be accompanying him. He requires a strategic advisor during medical procedures."

The dentist, a man who had seen a lot of strange things in Port Huron in 2026 but never a shark-themed villainous trio, began the exam.

"Open wide," the dentist said.

Gura opened his mouth. The dentist blinked. "I've... I've never seen teeth quite this... sharp. Or this many of them."

"He's a Great White," Riva explained smoothly, leaning over Gura and holding his hand. "The canine density is a biological necessity. Just fix the molar and skip the lecture on flossing. He uses a wire brush for that."

Gura let out a low, nervous rumble in his chest. Riva squeezed his hand, his thumb tracing a slow, grounding circle over Gura's knuckles. "Easy, you brute. I'm right here. Think about the steak dinner we're having after this."

As the drill whirred to life, Gura squeezed Riva's hand back with enough force to

potentially crack the chair’s armrest. Riva didn't flinch. He leaned in, his purple hood brushing against Gura's grey one. "Focus on my voice, Gura. Statistically, this will be over in three hundred seconds."

Twenty minutes later, Gura emerged from the back room, his jaw numb but his molar intact. He was holding a small plastic treasure chest Regina had demanded for him.

"I got a sticker," Gura mumbled through the local anesthetic, his speech slurred but his spirit restored. He showed Riva a sticker that said I Was Brave! featuring a smiling sun.

Riva smiled, reaching up to adjust Gura’s hood. "Indeed you were. Now, let’s get the Princess and the bat out of here before they decide to 'redecorate' the waiting room."

As the Shark Squad waddled out into the 31°F January air of 2026, Gura leaned his heavy head on Riva’s shoulder. "Riva? No more diamonds for snacks."

"A wise calculation, my dear shark," Riva whispered, squeezing his hand. "A very wise calculation."

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The Port Huron Urgent Care was experiencing a quiet Saturday evening on January 17, 2026, until the automatic doors slid open to admit a purple shark, a grey shark, and a red shark.

Riva strode to the reception desk, his silver-topped cane clicking on the linoleum. "Statistically, the human immune system is a failure, but apparently, even Mercenare biology is susceptible to the 'Michigan Flu.' My associate requires immediate medical evaluation."

Behind him, Gura let out a sneeze that rattled the glass partitions. He was wrapped in a massive grey shark onesie, his eyes watery and his nose a bright, uncharacteristic pink. "I feel... like I swallowed a Distain," Gura croaked, his voice a congested rumble.

Regina, wearing her red shark hood, was already busy rearranging the magazines in the waiting area by "Level of Evil." "Loot is sick too! Look at him! He’s drooping!"

Loot the bat was tucked into the crook of Gura’s neck, his tiny wings wrapped around himself like a fuzzy brown blanket. He let out a pathetic, congested skree and sneezed a tiny puff of bat-shivers.

"Mr... Gura?" the nurse called, looking nervously at the trio.

In the exam room, Riva took charge. He sat on the edge of the swivel stool,

adjusting his monocle as the doctor entered. "Doctor, before you begin, be aware that Gura’s heart rate is naturally lower than a human's, and his appetite is infinite. Do not mistake his lethargy for anything other than a lack of protein."

The doctor, a 2026 veteran who had seen everything from Port Huron’s "Big Freeze" injuries to festival mishaps, sighed. "Let's start with a temperature check."

As the thermometer was placed in Gura’s mouth, the big man let out a low, nervous whimper. Riva immediately stepped closer, taking Gura’s massive, fever-warm hand in his own. "Easy, you brute. It’s a sensory probe, not a Glitter Force weapon. Focus on me."

Gura squeezed Riva’s hand, his grip tight despite his fatigue. Riva didn't pull away; instead, he used his free hand to gently stroke the hair back from Gura’s damp forehead. "You’re burning up," Riva murmured, his theatrical tone softening into genuine concern. "Once we get your 'fuel' back in balance, we’ll return to the palace."

"I want... grape medicine," Gura muffled around the thermometer. "The purple kind. Like Riva."

"He shall have the purple medicine," Riva commanded the doctor. "And the Princess requires a sticker for her 'support' during this crisis."

Regina looked up from her tablet. "And Loot needs a tiny bandage! For his morale!"

After a prescription for rest and high-grade fluids was issued, the Shark Squad waddled back out into the 29°F January night. Gura leaned heavily on Riva, his grey fleece rubbing against Riva’s purple sleeves.

"Riva?" Gura whispered as they reached the car. "Thanks for holding my hand. Even if it was statistically unnecessary."

Riva reached up, adjusting Gura’s shark hood to keep the wind out. "In 2026, Gura, some things are beyond statistics." He leaned in, pressing a quick, protective kiss to Gura’s warm cheek. "Now, let’s get you home. I believe we have a mountain of soup with your name on it."

Loot let out a tiny, healing chirp from Gura’s pocket, and the Shark Squad headed into the winter dark, unified by a flu they would conquer together.

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The Port Huron pier was visible through the frost-rimed windows of the "Shark Squad’s" temporary 2026 Michigan headquarters. Outside, it was a brutal Saturday night, January 17, 2026, with temperatures plunging to a bone-chilling 24°F. Inside, however, the air was thick with the scent of eucalyptus, menthol, and a very grumpy princess.

"Statistically, our immune systems should have been fortified by the darkness of the Shadow Realm," Riva remarked, though his voice was a mere raspy shadow of its usual theatrical lilt. He was wrapped in three layers of purple silk blankets over his shark onesie, his monocle fogging up every time he exhaled.

Gura let out a sneeze so powerful it literally blew the "Shark Squad" schedule off the wall. He was buried under a mountain of grey fleece, his eyes watery and his nose a vibrant, uncharacteristic pink. "I feel... like I was chewed on by a Distain," Gura groaned, his voice a congested rumble that shook the bedframe.

Regina, surprisingly, was the only one still standing, though her red shark hood was pulled tight. She was currently balancing a silver tray with a look of extreme, bratty focus. "Loot is the worst patient ever! He won't stay under the tiny tea towel!"

Loot the bat was indeed a disaster. He had a tiny bat-cold, which manifested in him sneezing so hard he did involuntary backflips in mid-air. He let out a pathetic, congested skree and landed squarely on Gura’s forehead, his wings shivering.

"Patience, Princess," Riva coughed, reaching out a trembling hand to steady her. "Gura, open up. It is time for the 'Purple Power' syrup the human doctor provided. Statistically, it is ninety percent sugar, which should appeal to your basic instincts."

Gura opened his mouth with a pitiful whimper. Riva carefully administered the medicine, then leaned forward, pressing his cool forehead against Gura’s burning one. "You’re still too warm, you brute. If you don't recover by tomorrow, I’m going to have to do the 2026 Winter Ambush by myself, and I'll have nobody to carry the heavy equipment."

Gura reached out from the blankets, his massive, fever-warm hand finding Riva’s. He squeezed it tight. "Don't go. Stay here. The blankets are better when you’re in them."

Riva’s face flushed a deep violet that had nothing to do with the fever. He sighed, sliding into the "fortress" of blankets beside Gura. "Very well. But only to act as a biological heat-sink."

Regina climbed in on the other side, tucking a shivering Loot into the "mouth" of Gura’s grey shark hood. "We’re a sick-shark-pile," she declared, already yawning. "No conquering the world until Monday."

As the 2026 January wind howled against the glass, the Shark Squad huddled together—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. In the middle of a Michigan flu, they found the only medicine that actually worked: the warmth of a family that stayed together, even when the world was a blurry, congested mess.

&

The Port Huron night was a wall of biting 21°F cold outside the "Shark Squad’s" temporary headquarters on this Saturday, January 17, 2026. Inside, the radiator hissed a rhythmic, metallic tune, struggling against the Michigan frost, but the three Mercenare generals had long ago abandoned individual beds for a more "statistically efficient" heat source.

"The thermal dissipation in this room is unacceptable, Gura," Riva whispered, his voice soft to avoid waking the princess. He was already tucked into the center of the massive, quilt-covered bed, dressed in his purple shark onesie. His top hat sat on the nightstand, guarding a lukewarm cup of chamomile tea.

Gura let out a low, rumbling hum of agreement. He was a mountain of grey fleece on the right side of the bed, his massive arm draped protectively across the middle. "Stop calculating the air and get under the heavy blanket, Riva. Your feet are like ice cubes."

Regina was a quiet, red-fleece heap between them. She was sprawled diagonally, one hand clutching a plush shark and the other resting on Gura’s bicep. She had spent the day at the 2026 Winter Pancake Festival, and the sugar crash had finally claimed her.

Loot the bat was the final piece of the puzzle. He had abandoned his velvet roost for the night, preferring the "shark-mouth" hood of Gura’s onesie. He was tucked into the grey fleece, his tiny wings wrapped tight around his fuzzy body, letting out a soft, rhythmic skree with every breath.

"Regina is taking up seventy percent of the mattress," Riva murmured, though he didn't move. He leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the polyester of their shark suits creating a soft, static-filled friction.

Gura shifted, pulling the heavy duvet up over Riva’s shoulders. "She’s the Princess. She gets the space. You get the warmth." Gura leaned down, his forehead resting against Riva's in the dark. In the quiet of 2026, away from the Glitter Force and the Shadow Realm, the "brute" looked entirely at peace.

"I love you, Gura," Riva whispered, the confession muffled by Gura’s fleece shoulder. "Even if you do snore like a Distain."

"Love you too, purple," Gura rumbled, his eyes closing as he pulled Riva flush against his side.

As the clock ticked toward 11:00 PM on this January night, the Shark Squad was still. The only sounds were the radiator’s hiss and the synchronized breathing of a princess, two monsters, and a bat—all safe within the only world that mattered, wrapped in shark-fleece and the silence of the Michigan winter.

&

In the quiet of their Port Huron headquarters on this Saturday night, January 17, 2026, the Michigan frost crawled across the windowpanes in delicate patterns. Under a mountain of heavy quilts, the Shark Squad drifted into a shared subconscious—a 2026 dreamscape where the rules of the Shadow Realm were rewritten.

Regina dreamed of a sky made of crimson velvet. She wasn't a princess born of a hole in a king's heart; she was the architect of a world where every "Happy Ending" belonged solely to her. In her dream, she rode on the back of a giant, spectral Loot, whose wingspan was large enough to carry her across the Blue Water Bridge and beyond.

"Look, Loot!" she laughed, her red shark hood flapping in the wind. "The Glitter Force aren't even fighting! They're just... baking us a cake!" Below her, the five warriors were busy frosting a ten-story strawberry shortcake in the middle of Pine Grove Park, looking up at her with genuine, uncalculated smiles. For once, Regina didn't feel the sharp sting of loneliness or the pressure to be "evil"—she was simply the most important girl in a world that finally made sense.

Gura's dream was a sensory masterpiece of gluttony and warmth. He found himself standing in a literal "Sea of Steaks," where the waves were made of warm gravy and the clouds were giant, fluffy marshmallows. He waded through the savory tide, catching "Slider-Fish" with his bare hands.

But the best part of the dream wasn't the food. It was Riva, sitting on a gingerbread pier, wearing a chef's hat made of violet silk. Riva wasn't yelling about plans or 2026 statistics; he was laughing, his purple shark onesie glowing in the sun.

"I've seasoned the roast exactly how you like it, Gura," Riva's dream-self said, handing him a golden plate that never emptied. Gura sat down, his heart feeling fuller than his stomach ever could. In this world, Riva was never stressed, and they had all the time in the world to eat until the sun went down.

Riva dreamed of a grand, celestial clockwork. He stood in the center of a theater shaped like a Great White, orchestrating the movements of the stars with his silver-topped cane. Everything was precise, elegant, and perfectly under his control.

He felt a familiar, heavy warmth behind him. He turned to find Gura, looking dapper in a suit that didn't pinch his shoulders, holding a bouquet of purple roses.

"The show is perfect, Riva," Gura whispered, his voice a low, melodic rumble. "But I think the director needs a break."

The theater melted away into a quiet, sunlit garden in Port Huron. There were no battles, no Bel, and no looming threat of destruction. Riva leaned his head against Gura's shoulder, the ticking of the clocks replaced by the steady, calm heartbeat of the man beside him. For the first time, Riva's mind was quiet; he didn't have to be

the smartest person in the room. He just had to be Riva.

Loot, tucked into the crook of Gura’s elbow in the waking world, had the smallest dream of all. He dreamed of a giant, infinite mango. He hung upside down from a branch that felt exactly like Riva’s silk scarf, surrounded by three large, warm "sharks" who never let the heater go out.

As 2026 turned toward another day, the four of them breathed in unison—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—all safe within the only world where they were truly allowed to win.

&

The sun was struggling to pierce the thick Michigan frost on this Sunday morning, January 18, 2026. Inside their Port Huron hideout, the radiator hummed a low, tired tune, but the real noise was coming from Loot.

The fruit bat had decided that 8:00 AM was the optimal time for a "sonar breakfast." He was currently dive-bombing the massive, fleece-covered lump in the center of the bed, letting out sharp, rhythmic skrees that sounded like a squeaky toy on high speed.

"Loot, stop it," Regina grumbled from the depths of the blankets. She emerged like a disgruntled red shark from a coral reef, her blonde hair a chaotic mess. "If you wake me up before the sun is fully operational, I’m turning your favorite mango bowl into a footstool."

Loot didn't listen. Instead, he landed squarely on Gura’s nose.

The effect was instantaneous. Gura let out a startled, snorting bark that shook the entire mattress. "I'm awake! The shark is hunting! Don't let the pancakes escape!" Gura bolted upright, his grey shark hood falling over his eyes.

"Gura, for the love of all that is theatrical, sit down," Riva groaned. He had been pinned under Gura’s massive arm and was now slowly sliding toward the floor. Riva sat up, smoothing his purple shark onesie with a dignity that was hard to maintain given his bedhead. "Statistically, your morning energy levels are an affront to the quietude of the 2026 winter season."

Gura blinked, finally pushing his hood back. He looked at Riva—pale, rumpled, and glaring through his monocle—and let out a deep, rumbling laugh. "Sorry, purple. I dreamt the humans at the festival were hiding the blueberry syrup. I had to take action."

"The only action you're taking is making us coffee," Regina declared, kicking the blankets off. "And Loot wants his heated fruit puree. Now! Or the Shark Squad is going on strike."

Riva sighed, but as Gura reached over to give his shoulder a warm, grounding squeeze, the irritation vanished. Riva leaned in, pressing a quick, sleep-warm kiss to Gura’s cheek. "Fine. But Gura, if you use the 'Extra-Large' bacon pan again, you are cleaning the grease off the ceiling."

"Deal," Gura grinned, plucking Loot from the air and tucking him into his fleece pocket.

By 8:30 AM on this 2026 Sunday, the Shark Squad was officially vertical. As the scent of sizzling bacon and heated mango filled the room, the Shadow Realm felt a million miles away, replaced by the simple, noisy warmth of a family waking up together.

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The Port Huron hideout was filled with the heavy, sweet scent of maple and sizzling grease on this Sunday morning, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan wind whipped around the Blue Water Bridge at a biting 26°F, but inside, the “Shark Squad” was engaged in its most important mission: the Sunday Morning Scramble.

“Statistically, the structural integrity of this pancake stack is failing, Gura,” Riva remarked. He was meticulously drizzling raspberry syrup in precise, geometric patterns over a plate of flapjacks. He wore his signature purple shark onesie, though he had added a crisp silk apron over the fleece for "culinary protection."

Gura, looking like a massive grey bear in his unzipped shark onesie, was currently manning the cast-iron skillet. He was flipping bacon with a speed that defied his bulk. “It’s not a skyscraper, Riva, it’s breakfast! If it leans to the left, it’s just easier to eat.” He let out a booming laugh, the sound vibrating through the small kitchen.

Regina sat at the table, her red shark hood pulled up as she banged her fork against the wood. “More chocolate chips! I am the Princess of Splendorius, and I demand a higher sugar-to-flour ratio! Loot, tell him!”

Loot the bat was perched on the handle of the fruit basket, his tiny onyx eyes fixed on a bowl of steaming mango mash. He let out a sharp, supportive skree and did a quick flip in the air, his miniature shark-hoodie sleeves fluttering.

“Patience, you little gluttons,” Riva sighed, though his eyes softened as he looked at Gura. He walked over to the stove and, with a practiced hand, wiped a stray drop of grease from Gura’s cheek. “You’re burning the edges of the sourdough, you brute.”

“I like ‘em crunchy,” Gura rumbled, leaning down to press a quick, cinnamon-scented kiss to Riva’s forehead. “Reminds me of our first ambush in 2026. Spicy and a little scorched.”

Riva’s face flushed a deep violet. “Don't be sentimental while handling hot oil. It’s a

safety hazard.”

The four of them huddled around the small kitchen table, a sea of grey, purple, and red fleece. Loot dived into his mango bowl, emerging with a bright orange mustache that made Regina shriek with laughter. Gura handed Riva the largest, crispest piece of bacon, while Riva surreptitiously slid his extra strawberries onto Gura’s plate.

“Best morning of 2026 so far,” Gura muffled through a mouthful of pancake.

“Indeed,” Riva whispered, his hand finding Gura’s under the table. As the January sun finally broke through the clouds over Lake Huron, the Shark Squad sat in silence—a princess, two monsters, and a bat, perfectly, happily full.

&

The Port Huron night was a wall of 22°F ice outside their hideout on this Saturday, January 17, 2026, but the interior glowed with a light that had nothing to do with the flickering fireplace. Spread across the velvet duvet was the "Shark Squad’s" most recent acquisition: a shimmering hoard of gemstones "liberated" from a high-end 2026 winter exhibition.

"Observe the refraction index of this sapphire, Gura," Riva remarked, holding a deep-blue stone up to his monocle. He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, the hood pushed back to reveal his intense, analytical focus. "Statistically, its purity is ninety-eight percent. It is the only thing in this room as cold as my heart."

"Your heart isn't cold, Riva, it’s just picky," Gura rumbled. The massive man was sitting cross-legged in his grey shark fleece, using a giant ruby as a makeshift paperweight for his bag of jerky. He picked up a handful of emeralds, letting them clatter through his thick fingers like green rain. "I like the red ones. They look like the cherries on those 2026 festival sundaes."

Regina was in her element, draped in a red shark onesie and currently wearing three diamond tiaras stacked on top of each other. "I’m the Queen of Sparkles! Loot, fetch the gold chain! The heavy one!"

Loot the bat was a blurred streak of brown fur, his wings flapping frantically as he dragged a thick, 24-karat gold necklace across the bed. He was wearing his tailored shark hoodie, the tiny silver fin on his back glinting. He let out a triumphant skree and dropped the "loot" onto Regina’s lap, nearly knocking over a pile of pearls.

"Good bat," Regina chirped, feeding him a grape. "Riva, look! I’m going to make a suit of armor out of these. We’ll be the shiniest sharks in Michigan!"

Riva sighed, but he couldn't hide the smirk as he watched Gura try to balance a large topaz on his nose. "A diamond-encrusted shark onesie would be an aesthetic catastrophe, Princess. However," he turned to Gura, his voice softening into a

private, 2026-weary tone, "I suppose we could spare one of these smaller diamonds for a... commemorative project."

Riva picked up a small, perfectly cut diamond and pressed it into Gura’s large palm. Gura looked at the stone, then up at Riva, his golden eyes reflecting the hearth-fire.

"For a ring?" Gura whispered, his voice a low, gravelly vibration.

"For whatever you wish, you brute," Riva murmured, leaning in to press his forehead against Gura’s. "As long as you don't try to eat it."

Gura laughed, a deep sound that made the jewels on the bed rattle. He pulled Riva into a crushing, fleece-covered hug, the gems biting into their chests, but neither cared.

"Happy 2026, Riva," Gura muffled.

"Indeed," Riva whispered, closing his eyes as Loot settled on his shoulder. "Indeed."

&

The Port Huron night was a wall of biting 21°F ice outside their headquarters on this Saturday, January 17, 2026. Inside, the atmosphere was significantly more colorful, as Regina had decided that the Shark Squad’s 2026 aesthetic was currently "tragically drab."

"If we are to strike fear into the hearts of the humans tomorrow, we must embrace the power of the palette!" Regina declared, slamming a massive, glittering makeup trunk onto the coffee table. She was wearing her red shark onesie, her blonde hair tied back with a velvet ribbon. "Loot, fetch the blending sponges!"

Loot the bat let out a supportive skree and dived into the trunk, emerging with a tiny pink sponge clutched in his teeth. He was wearing his miniature shark hoodie, looking like the world’s most aerodynamic beauty consultant.

Riva sat on a velvet stool, looking deeply skeptical as he adjusted his monocle. He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, but he had allowed Regina to drape a silk salon cape over his shoulders. "Statistically, Regina, the application of 'Midnight Amethyst' eyeshadow does not increase our combat effectiveness. It merely increases the time it takes to get ready by forty percent."

"Silence, Riva! Your cheekbones are a tactical asset and I will treat them as such!" Regina commanded, brandishing a contour brush like a weapon.

Gura was sitting on the floor, his massive frame squeezed into his grey shark fleece. He was currently staring at a row of lip glosses as if they were a new species of snack. "Does the red one taste like strawberry?" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration.

"No, Gura, it tastes like 'Sovereign Wrath,'" Riva sighed, though he didn't pull away as Regina began to apply a sharp, violet wing of eyeliner to his lids. "And stay still, or you'll end up looking like a very confused clownfish."

Gura grinned, showing his sharp teeth. "I want the silver sparkles. Like the ice on the Blue Water Bridge."

Regina moved on to Gura with a look of intense, artistic focus. She applied a bold streak of silver highlighter across his brow and some dark charcoal shadow around his eyes. The result made Gura look less like a brute and more like a celestial predator from the deep.

"Observe," Riva murmured, leaning over to inspect Gura's face. He reached out and used a silk cloth to soften the edge of Gura's silver highlight. "It... actually accentuates your ocular intensity, you brute."

Gura let out a low, rumbling chuckle and leaned in, pressing a quick, glitter-smearing kiss to Riva's cheek. "Now you're sparkly too, Riva."

Riva huffed, his face flushing a deep violet that matched his new eyeshadow. "You are a disaster, Gura. A glittering, uncoordinated disaster."

Loot fluttered down and landed on Riva's shoulder, his tiny face now dusted with a bit of "Diamond Dust" shimmer. He looked at himself in the mirror and let out a triumphant chirp.

As the 2026 January wind howled against the glass, the Shark Squad sat in a heap of glitter and fleece—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. They were covered in "Midnight Amethyst" and "Arctic Silver," perfectly, beautifully ready to face whatever 2026 had in store.

&

The Port Huron afternoon was a crisp 32°F on this Sunday, January 18, 2026, as the Shark Squad marched toward the entrance of the local zoo. After the success of the 2026 Winter Pancake Festival, Regina had decided the group needed to "reconnect with their feral roots."

"Statistically, the containment of these creatures is an insult to their predatory instincts," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood. He was wearing his signature oversized sunglasses, even in the overcast Michigan light. "Though I suppose the climate control in the reptile house is a luxury we should consider for the palace."

"Look! Big cats!" Regina shouted, dragging a reluctant Gura toward the snow leopard enclosure. She was wearing her red shark onesie, her blonde hair tucked into a warm knit cap. "Loot, tell the leopards who the real boss is!"

Loot the bat, tucked into the chest pocket of Gura’s grey shark onesie, poked his head out. He looked at the massive cats and let out a tiny, unimpressed skree. He was wearing his custom-made winter bat-coat, and he clearly felt superior to any creature that couldn't fly.

Gura let out a low, rumbling laugh, the sound vibrating through his fleece. "They look bored, Princess. They need a steak. Or a burger. Or a whole cow." He looked at a nearby snack cart, his eyes widening. "Riva, do you think they sell 'Lion-Sized' soft pretzels?"

"Gura, you just ate your weight in breakfast meat three hours ago," Riva sighed, though he reached into his pocket and produced a ten-dollar bill. "Go. But if you try to share it with the bears, I am leaving you in the habitat."

The squad moved toward the aquarium section, which was the main event. Standing before the massive glass tank, the three sharks fell silent. A group of sand tiger sharks glided past, their cold, yellow eyes reflecting the blue light of the 2026 display.

"See?" Gura whispered, his voice a low, gravelly vibration. He reached out and took Riva’s hand, their fingers interlocking in the cool, blue-lit hallway. "That’s us. Silent. Sharp. Together."

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the polyester of their onesies rubbing together. "Indeed. Though their lack of accessories remains a tragedy. Imagine that Great White with a silk cravat, Gura. It would be formidable."

Regina pressed her face against the glass. "One day, I’m going to have a moat filled with these. And the Glitter Force will have to swim through it to get to my snacks!"

Loot scrambled out of Gura's pocket and landed on the railing, his onyx eyes fixed on a passing school of fish. He let out a sharp chirp of approval.

As the January sun began to dip over the Michigan horizon, the Shark Squad waddled back toward the parking lot—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. Surrounded by the wild spirits of the zoo, they felt perfectly at home in their own unique, 2026 brand of predator family.

&

The aisles of the Port Huron Meijer were unusually quiet for a Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026, until the automatic doors hissed open to admit the Shark Squad. The Michigan air outside was a biting 27°F, making the fluorescent-lit warmth of the grocery store feel like a tactical sanctuary.

"I have calculated the most efficient route to the snack aisle," Riva remarked, pushing a silver shopping cart with the grace of a man leading a cavalry charge. He

was dressed in his signature purple shark onesie, his top hat replaced by a matching violet beanie. "Statistically, if we don't find the 'Limited Edition 2026 Winter Mangoes' in the next five minutes, Loot will begin a sonic protest."

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, was currently hanging off the back of the cart, his heavy boots skidding across the linoleum. "Forget the mangoes! Look at the 'Family Size' bacon packs! Riva, they’re 'Buy One, Get One Free'! It’s like the humans want us to be powerful!"

Regina was sitting in the child seat of the cart, her red shark hood pulled up as she pointed a gloved finger at the bakery section. "To the doughnuts! I want the ones with the blue frosting that turns your tongue into a Mercenare sigil! Loot, navigate!"

Loot the bat, perched on the handle of the cart, let out a sharp, navigational skree. He was wearing his miniature shark hoodie, looking like a tiny, winged GPS. He dived into the produce section, returning with a single, perfectly ripe grape clutched in his feet.

"Excellent work, Loot," Riva sighed, though he reached out and snatched a giant bag of beef jerky from the shelf, tossing it into the cart for Gura. "And Gura, stop trying to 'sample' the bulk cashews. We are undercover, not at a buffet."

Gura let out a low, rumbling laugh that made the nearby cereal boxes rattle. He leaned over and gave Riva a quick, cinnamon-scented kiss on the cheek. "You're just cranky because you can't find the organic tea, purple."

"The tea is in Aisle 12, you brute," Riva huffed, though his face flushed a deep violet.

They reached the frozen food section, where the 2026 Michigan winter seemed to follow them. Gura pressed his face against the glass of the ice cream freezer. "Riva! 'Shark-Attack Sorbet'! It’s a sign!"

By the time they reached the checkout, the cart was a structural hazard. It was a mountain of steak, blue doughnuts, mangoes, and three different kinds of "Shark-Themed" cereal.

"That will be one hundred and sixty-eight dollars," the cashier said, staring at the three adults in shark pajamas and the bat currently trying to eat a barcode scanner.

Riva produced a gold-encrusted credit card with a flourish. "A small price to pay for the 2026 nutritional security of the Squad."

As they waddled out into the 25°F January wind, Gura grabbed the heavy bags in one hand and Riva’s hand in the other. "Best mission ever, Riva."

"Indeed," Riva whispered, squeezing Gura's hand as Loot settled into his hood. "Indeed."

&

The gray winter sky over Port Huron was a sheet of slate on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026. The temperature sat at a crisp 28°F, but the Shark Squad was currently preoccupied with a high-tech delivery that had just arrived at their hideout near the Blue Water Bridge.

"Behold," Riva declared, gesturing with a silk-gloved hand toward a sleek, matte-black quadcopter. "The 2026 'Predator-X' Surveillance Drone. Statistically, it increases our reconnaissance range by six hundred percent. No Glitter Force picnic will go un-monitored." He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, though he had added a high-tech headset over his violet hood.

Gura, looking massive in his gray shark fleece, poked the drone with a meaty finger. "Does it have a claw? Can it carry a burger? Because a spy-bird that can’t fetch snacks is just a loud fly, Riva."

Regina snatched the remote from Riva’s hand, her red shark fin bobbing with excitement. "I want to fly it! I’m going to use it to drop water balloons on the humans at the park! Loot, you’re the wingman! If the drone gets stuck in a tree, you’re the retrieval unit!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, competitive skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 flight harness, looking like a tiny, furry fighter pilot. He circled the drone, his wings flapping in a frantic, rhythmic beat as the propellers began to whine.

"Regina, be careful with the joystick! The torque on a 2026 model is—"

VROOOOM.

The drone shot upward, narrowly missing Gura’s nose and spiraling toward the icy St. Clair River. Regina cackled, her eyes gleaming with chaotic glee. "Look at it go! It’s like a tiny, angry shark in the sky!"

"It’s heading for the bridge!" Gura roared, his heavy boots crunching on the frost as he started to run after it. "If that thing hits a cable, Riva’s gonna cry!"

Riva didn't cry, but his face turned a deep shade of violet. "Regina! Engage the 'Return to Home' protocol! Statistically, we are five seconds away from a maritime disaster!"

Loot took the command literally. Seeing the drone waver in the Michigan wind, the bat dived. He caught the landing gear in his tiny feet, his wings straining against the 2026 motor. With a heroic chirp, Loot helped stabilize the craft, guiding it back toward the snowy bank where Gura was waiting with open arms.

Gura caught the drone (and the bat) in a massive, fleece-covered hug. "I got 'em! The Shark-Air-Force is safe!"

Riva let out a long, shuddering sigh of relief, walking over to adjust Loot’s tiny flight goggles. "A successful, if harrowing, maiden voyage." He looked at Gura, who was now trying to see if the drone could lift a bag of jerky. "And Gura, we are not using the surveillance equipment to 'airlift' snacks from the nearby Meijer."

"Why not?" Gura grunted, pulling Riva into a lopsided, shark-fleece embrace. "It’s 2026, Riva. The future is now."

Regina skipped ahead toward the heated hideout. "Next time, we’re mounting a glitter-cannon on it! Let's see how they like their own medicine!"

As the January sun dipped toward the horizon, the Shark Squad headed inside—a princess, two monsters, a bat, and a drone—unified by a bond that even the highest tech couldn't replace.

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The Port Huron hideout was a sea of crinkling plastic and discarded cardboard on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan wind whipped off Lake Huron at a biting 24°F, but inside, the Shark Squad was neck-deep in a "tactical snack acquisition" from their morning Meijer run.

"The sodium-to-flavor ratio of these 'Extreme Buffalo' chips is statistically overwhelming," Riva remarked, using a pair of silver tongs to pick a single chip from the bag to avoid getting orange dust on his purple shark onesie. "It is an aggressive culinary experience, Gura."

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, didn't bother with tongs. He had a "Family Size" bag of ranch-flavored pretzels tipped directly toward his mouth. "That’s the point, Riva! If your mouth isn't tingling, are you even eating?" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration. He reached over and offered a handful of pretzels to Riva. "Here. It balances out that fancy tea you’re sipping."

Regina was currently building a fortress out of "Blue Raspberry" fruit leathers. She was wearing her red shark hood, her blonde hair dusted with powdered sugar from a nearby box of mini-donuts. "I’m the Queen of the Candy Kingdom! Loot, fetch the gummy sharks! The ones with the white bellies!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his miniature shark hoodie, looking like a tiny, winged connoisseur. He dived into a bowl of "2026 Winter Edition" tropical trail mix, emerging with a single, dried mango slice clutched in his teeth. He performed a victory lap around the radiator before landing on Riva’s shoulder to share his prize.

"Excellent choice, Loot. At least someone in this room understands the value of fruit over processed grease," Riva sighed, though he surreptitiously reached into Gura’s bag for another pretzel.

Gura caught him and grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the 2026 winter sun. He leaned over, his grey fleece rubbing against Riva’s purple sleeves, and gave him a quick, salt-flavored kiss on the cheek. "Caught you, purple. You’re a snack-thief."

"I am merely... performing a quality check," Riva huffed, his face flushing a deep violet.

As the afternoon light began to fade over the Blue Water Bridge, the Shark Squad settled into a comfortable sugar-crash. Regina was sprawled across the sofa, Loot was fast asleep on a pile of marshmallows, and Gura was leaning his heavy head against Riva’s shoulder, a half-eaten jerky stick still in his hand.

"Riva?" Gura muffled.

"Yes, Gura?"

"We’re out of dip."

Riva closed his eyes, leaning into Gura's warmth. "Statistically, Gura, we have enough calories in this room to power the Shadow Realm for a month. Stay put."

"Fine," Gura grunted, squeezing Riva’s hand. "But tomorrow, we go back for more."

As the 2026 Michigan winter deepened, the Shark Squad sat in silence—perfectly, happily, and stickily full.

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The Port Huron hideout was nearly unrecognizable on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026. The Michigan winter outside was a brutal 25°F, but the interior had been transformed into a plush, polyester tundra. After a highly successful raid on a local toy warehouse, the Shark Squad was currently submerged in a mountain of stuffed animals.

"Statistically, the floor is no longer a viable surface," Riva remarked. He was perched atop a giant, five-foot-long lavender octopus, his purple shark onesie blending into the tentacles. He adjusted his monocle, holding a clipboard to inventory the haul. "We have reached a critical mass of fluff, Gura. If we add one more oversized teddy bear, the structural integrity of the room will fail."

"The room’s fine, Riva! Look at this guy!" Gura roared. The massive man was buried up to his chest in a sea of grey and blue plush sharks. He was hugging a particularly plump Great White that was wearing a tiny sailor hat. "He’s got a squeaker in his fin! It sounds like a Distain being stepped on!" Gura squeezed the toy, and a sharp honk echoed through the room.

Regina was currently face-down in a pile of crimson dragons and black-and-red unicorns. She emerged, her red shark hood slightly askew, holding a plushie that

looked remarkably like a round, angry bat. "This one is the Royal Guardian! Loot, come meet your double!"

Loot the bat let out a confused skree and dived into the pile. He emerged a second later, dragging a miniature plush mango that was almost as big as he was. He was wearing his 2026 custom shark hoodie, and he immediately began to "roost" on top of Gura’s head, using the grey fleece hood as a nest.

"Loot has claimed the high ground," Riva sighed, though his eyes softened as he watched Gura try to balance a stuffed penguin on each shoulder. "Gura, why are you attempting to domesticate the flightless birds? They are an evolutionary dead end."

"They're not birds, they're snacks for the sharks!" Gura laughed, his deep, rumbling voice making the plush mountain vibrate. He reached out and grabbed Riva’s hand, pulling the "theatrical strategist" down into the softness of the shark pile. "Relax, purple. It’s 2026. Everything is soft today."

Riva landed with a soft oomph against a giant marshmallow-shaped cat. He looked at the chaos—the sticky 2026 Winter Festival crumbs on Gura’s chin, the princess crowned in unicorn plushies, and the bat currently trying to groom a stuffed shark.

"I suppose... the tactile feedback is acceptable," Riva murmured, leaning his head against Gura’s shoulder.

Gura wrapped a massive, fleece-covered arm around Riva and Regina, pulling them into the center of the fluff. "Best mission ever, right?"

"Indeed," Riva whispered, closing his eyes as Loot settled into the crook of his neck.

As the January sun began to set over the icy St. Clair River, the Shark Squad sat in silence—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—all perfectly, warmly hidden in a world made of stuffing and love.

&

The January wind rattled the windows of their Port Huron hideout on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026. Inside, the Shark Squad was lost in a deep, post-pancake nap, their collective minds drifting into a shared, sunny dream where the shadows of Splendorius and the weight of their monstrous forms had simply evaporated.

In the dream, the sun was warm and golden, the kind of light that only exists in 2026 memories of perfect summers.

Gura stood on a boardwalk, but he wasn't a hulking general in fleece. He was a tall, broad-shouldered man with a tan and a messy mane of sun-bleached hair. He wore a simple Hawaiian shirt and board shorts, his feet bare on the warm wood. He felt

light—his bottomless hunger replaced by a simple, quiet contentment.

"Hurry up, you brute! The ferry won't wait for us!"

Gura turned and laughed, a sound that was deep but no longer carried the rumble of a predator. Walking toward him was Riva, looking sharp and elegant in a tailored lavender linen suit and a straw fedora. Without his purple skin or pointed ears, Riva was a slender, handsome man with sharp features and eyes that crinkled at the corners when he smiled. He wasn't calculating a battle; he was calculating the best spot for their picnic.

Riva reached out, his human hand—warm and soft—sliding into Gura’s. "Statistically, we are already three minutes behind schedule," Riva teased, though he squeezed Gura’s hand tight.

"Schedule doesn't matter today, Riva," Gura whispered, leaning down to press a kiss to Riva’s temple. "We’re just... here."

Running ahead of them was Regina. In the dream, she wasn't a princess of shadows, but a bright-eyed girl in a red sundress, her blonde hair tied back with a simple yellow ribbon. She wasn't carrying a scepter; she was holding a giant stick of blue cotton candy.

"Look! The dolphins!" she shouted, pointing toward the sparkling blue water. She looked like any other happy child on a 2026 vacation, her laughter ringing out without a hint of malice.

And perched on her shoulder wasn't a Mercenare familiar, but a small, fuzzy brown fruit bat named Loot. In this dream, Loot didn't need a shark hoodie to be part of the squad. He simply chirped at the seagulls, his wings catching the salt breeze, a loyal pet in a world where he didn't have to be a spy.

The four of them sat on a patch of green grass overlooking the ocean. There was no King Mercenare calling them back, no Glitter Force to fight, and no looming threat of betrayal.

Riva opened a basket, pulling out a tray of sandwiches and a bottle of chilled lemonade. Gura leaned back against a tree, pulling Riva down to rest against his chest. As the dream-sun began to set, casting a long, orange glow over the 2026 horizon, they sat in perfect, human silence.

"Riva?" Gura murmured in the dream, his voice clear and full of love.

"Yes, Gura?"

"I'm glad we found this place."

Riva smiled, closing his eyes against the warmth. "Me too, my dear. Me too."

Back in the waking world of January 18, 2026, the radiator hissed and the Michigan snow continued to fall. Gura shifted in his sleep, his massive arm tightening around Riva, while Loot let out a soft, contented skree against Regina’s neck. The dream stayed with them, a quiet promise that in their hearts, they were already home.

&

The Port Huron Taco Bell was experiencing a typical Sunday rush on January 18, 2026, until the automatic doors slid open to reveal a purple shark, a grey shark, and a red shark. The Michigan air outside had plummeted to a bitter 24°F, making the scent of seasoned beef and melted cheese feel like a divine invitation.

"Statistically, the 'Live Mas' slogan is a challenge to our Mercenare constitution," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood. He surveyed the menu board with his silver-topped cane tucked under one arm. "I have calculated that we require a minimum of thirty-six tacos to achieve a baseline of satisfaction for this squad."

"Only thirty-six? That’s just a snack, Riva!" Gura roared, his grey shark onesie taking up the space of two humans in the queue. He was leaning over the counter, eyes wide at the "2026 Winter Cravings" menu. "I want the one with the lava sauce. And the one with the crunchy shell inside the soft shell. It’s like a tactical surprise for my stomach!"

Regina was already busy at the soda fountain, experimenting with a mixture of every available flavor. "I’m the Queen of the Baja Blast! Loot, navigate the napkins! We need a fortress for the hot sauce!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom-tailored 2026 shark hoodie, looking like a tiny, winged connoisseur of Tex-Mex. He dived toward the condiment stand, returning with a single "Fire" sauce packet clutched in his feet.

"Excellent work, Loot. Though the 'Fire' level may be a bit much for your delicate palate," Riva sighed, though he reached out and took the packet, tapping it against his monocle. He turned to the bewildered cashier. "We shall take the 'Shark-Sized' party pack. And don't skimp on the nacho cheese, or I shall be forced to leave a very theatrical review on the human internet."

They claimed a booth in the corner. Gura didn't just eat; he performed a "Feeding Frenzy." He was a blurred streak of grey fleece and mild sauce. "Riva," Gura muffled through a mouthful of Cheesy Gordita Crunch. "You gotta try this. It’s better than the donuts from the festival."

Riva took a delicate, surgical bite of a bean burrito. "The flavor profile is... aggressive. But I find the portability acceptable." He reached over and used a silk napkin to wipe a drop of hot sauce from Gura’s lip. "And try to breathe, you brute. We aren't being pursued by the Glitter Force at the moment."

"They wouldn't dare interrupt Taco Sunday," Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the 2026 fluorescent light. He leaned in and gave Riva a quick, cumin-scented kiss on the cheek.

Regina was busy dipping cinnamon twists into her multicolored soda. "This is the best 2026 mission yet! Loot, execute the final bean-burrito retrieval!"

Loot fluttered down and snagged a stray lettuce leaf, letting out a satisfied chirp. As the Shark Squad waddled out into the 22°F January night, Gura pulled Riva close against his warm, grey-fleece side.

"Riva? Can we come back for the late-night menu?"

Riva looked at the man who had become his entire world in 2026 and smiled. "Statistically, Gura, our calorie intake is already catastrophic. But... yes. We can come back."

"Happy 2026, Shark Squad," Gura rumbled, and the four of them vanished into the Michigan winter, perfectly, spicefully full.

&

The violet moonlight of the Shadow Realm filtered through the high, arched windows of the palace on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026. Inside Riva’s private chambers, the air was heavy with the scent of lavender and the low, rhythmic hum of a guttering candle.

Riva sat on the edge of the velvet bed, his purple silk shirt draped loosely over his shoulders. He had summoned his translucent, violet-tinged bat wings—a physical manifestation of his Mercenare essence that he usually kept hidden. Tonight, they were trembling, the delicate membranes stretched tight and vibrating with a phantom ache from the week's battles.

"The resonance is... statistically unbearable tonight, Gura," Riva whispered, his head bowed.

Gura stepped out of the shadows, his massive frame unburdened by his usual heavy frock coat. He sat on the floor behind Riva, a mountain of grounding warmth. "I’ve got you, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency.

Gura reached out, his large, calloused hands coming to rest at the base of Riva’s wings. He didn't use the brute force of a warrior; instead, he used a slow, circular pressure that made Riva’s breath hitch. His thumbs kneaded the thick muscle where the wings joined the spine, working out the knots of a thousand 2026 schemes.

"Oh," Riva exhaled, his eyes fluttering shut. "Right there, you brute. Don't stop."

Gura’s touch was a study in devotion. He moved his hands outward, his fingers

tracing the delicate "fingers" of the bat wings, sliding over the sensitive purple membrane with the reverence of a man handling starlight. Every stroke was a silent "I love you," a physical grounding that pulled Riva out of his head and into the heat of the moment.

As the tension in the wings finally melted, the massage turned into a lingering caress. Gura leaned forward, his chest pressing against Riva’s back, his lips finding the sensitive skin of Riva’s neck. The shift was seamless—the care of a partner turning into the hunger of a lover.

The lovemaking that followed was slow and deliberate. Gura was mindful of Riva’s slender frame, his touch a constant, rhythmic reassurance. Riva arched into the contact, his own wings wrapping around Gura’s shoulders like a velvet shroud, drawing them into a private cocoon. In the quiet of the 2026 winter afternoon, the only sounds were the soft rustle of silk and the involuntary, breathless sounds of their connection.

"Gura," Riva breathed, his voice trembling as he looked into Gura’s golden eyes. "I am entirely... yours."

Gura leaned down, his kiss tasting of salt and absolute loyalty. "Always, Riva. In every world, always."

In the sanctuary of the dark, the two villains found a peace that no conquest could ever provide. They weren't fighting for the King; they were simply two souls, finally and completely home in each other's arms.

&

The January sky over the Blue Water Bridge was a swirling vortex of purple and charcoal. Down on the Port Huron boardwalk, the human world had ground to a terrified halt. It was Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026, and the Shark Squad had finally decided that "stealth" was a concept for lesser villains.

"Statistically, our combined mass should be enough to flatten this entire pier!" Riva’s voice echoed, but it didn't come from his usual slender form.

In a blinding flash of negative energy, Riva and Gura had merged. Standing forty feet tall in the icy St. Clair River was their ultimate Distain form—a towering, biomechanical nightmare. It had Gura’s massive, hulking musculature and razor-sharp teeth, but it was draped in Riva’s theatrical violet armor, complete with a giant, iron-wrought top hat that acted as a secondary cannon.

"We look incredible!" Regina shrieked with delight.

She wasn't standing on the ground; she was perched triumphantly on the Distain’s massive shoulder, her red shark onesie flapping in the 26°F wind. She gripped one

of the jagged amethyst spikes on the Distain's collar like the horn of a saddle.

"Loot! Execute the aerial vantage!"

Loot the bat let out a sonic skree that shattered the nearby windows of a souvenir shop. He was wearing his 2026 tactical flight harness and was currently roosting on the very tip of the Distain’s giant top hat, looking like a fuzzy brown gargoyle guarding a fortress.

"TARGET ACQUIRED," the Distain roared, the voice a terrifying harmony of Gura’s rumble and Riva’s sharp lilt. A massive, clawed hand reached out and plucked a 2026 Winter Festival banner from the air, shredding it into confetti.

"To the park! I want to see the humans run!" Regina commanded, pointing her scepter toward Pine Grove Park.

The Distain let out a sound that was half-laugh, half-engine-growl. It began to wade through the freezing water, each step sending a tidal wave toward the Port Huron shoreline. From the shoulder, Regina felt every rhythmic thrum of power. It wasn't just a weapon; it was her family, expanded to the size of a mountain.

"Careful, Princess!" Riva’s voice drifted through the mental link. "The center of gravity is currently shifting due to Gura’s earlier pancake intake!"

"I'm fine! Just keep stomping!" Gura’s mental voice boomed back.

Loot dived from the hat, circling the Distain’s head like a tiny fighter jet, leading the way toward the 2026 Winter Carnival. As the massive shadow of the Shark Squad fell over the city, Regina threw her head back and laughed.

In the heart of Michigan, on a frozen Sunday in 2026, the Shark Squad wasn't just a group of villains in pajamas. They were a titan, a princess, and a bat—unified, unstoppable, and perfectly, monstrously together.

&

The Port Huron YMCA natatorium was humid and smelled of industrial-grade chlorine, a scent Riva found "statistically offensive to the refined palate." It was Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026, and the Shark Squad had effectively commandeered the shallow end for their weekly aquatic maneuvers.

"Observe the hydro-dynamics, Gura," Riva remarked, standing on the tiled edge in his signature purple shark onesie (which he had treated with a waterproof sealant). He adjusted his waterproof monocle—a 2026 custom order. "If we are to be a 'Shark Squad,' we must maintain a baseline of buoyancy."

"I don't need buoyancy, I have power!" Gura roared. He was already in the water, looking like a massive grey-fleece island. He was wearing a set of oversized "Shark-

Face" goggles that made his golden eyes look three times larger. With a sudden, explosive movement, he executed a cannonball that sent a tidal wave over the lifeguard stand.

"Gura! You’re getting my silk swimming cap wet!" Regina shrieked, laughing as she bobbed in the center of the pool on a giant, inflatable red shark. She was wearing her red shark hood, and she had draped a series of waterproof 2026 LED lights around her neck like a glowing coral reef. "Loot, dive-bomb him! Target the grey fin!"

Loot the bat was the most adventurous of all. He was wearing his custom 2026 "Aero-Shark" life vest, a tiny piece of foam and neoprene that kept him afloat. He didn't swim so much as "skitter," his wings flapping against the surface of the water like a wet moth. He let out a sharp, echoed skree and landed on Gura’s head, claiming the high ground.

"He's a sea-bat now!" Gura chuckled, the sound bubbling in the water as he submerged to his chin. He reached up, his massive wet hand gently steadying the bat on his hood. He looked over at Riva, who was still hesitating at the edge. "Come on in, purple. The water’s warm, and the humans already fled to the sauna when they saw the 'Shark Princess' arrive."

Riva sighed, but he elegantly lowered himself into the pool. As the warm water hit his fleece, he drifted toward Gura. Gura wrapped a massive, wet arm around Riva’s waist, pulling him into the center of the pool.

"You’re floating, Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, watery frequency.

"I am merely... maintaining a strategic position," Riva murmured, leaning his head against Gura’s damp shoulder.

Regina paddled her inflatable over to them, Loot hopping from Gura to the red plastic shark. "Next week, we’re bringing a submarine! I want to see what’s at the bottom of the deep end!"

As the 2026 January sun shone through the high windows, the Shark Squad drifted together—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the warm water and the simple joy of being the biggest predators in the Port Huron pool.

"Riva?" Gura whispered, nuzzling Riva's temple.

"Yes, Gura?"

"I think I left the snacks in the locker."

Riva smiled, closing his eyes. "Statistically, Gura, we will survive for another ten minutes. Just... stay still."

"Deal," Gura grunted, and they drifted in the blue silence, perfectly, shark-fully at home.

&

The Port Huron hideout was filled with the rhythmic hum of the radiator on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026, but the real chaos was unfolding in the master bathroom. The 28°F Michigan air outside had made the trio decide that a "high-temperature squad hygiene mission" was the only way to survive the frost.

"Statistically, the steam density in this room is reaching critical levels, Gura," Riva remarked, wiping a circle into the fogged-up mirror with a silk cloth. He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, though he had the sleeves rolled up as he meticulously organized a row of luxury facial serums. "I can barely see my own superior bone structure."

Gura was currently sitting on the edge of the oversized porcelain tub, looking like a damp grey mountain. He had already shed his grey shark fleece and was wrapped in a massive, fluffy towel. He was occupied with the most delicate task of the day: blow-drying Loot.

"Hold still, little thief," Gura rumbled, his deep voice echoing off the tiles. He held the hair dryer on the lowest, warmest setting, gently ruffling Loot’s fur. The bat was hanging upside down from Gura’s thumb, his wings spread wide to catch the heat. Loot let out a contented, muffled skree, his onyx eyes half-closed in a 2026-style spa trance.

Regina was standing on a stool at the double vanity, her red shark hood pushed back. She was currently "reorganizing" Riva’s skincare collection. "I’m the Queen of the Glow! Riva, why do you have three different bottles of 'Midnight Amethyst' moisturizer? It all smells like old flowers!"

"It smells like sophistication, Princess," Riva huffed, though he reached over and gently adjusted the angle of her headband. "And stop using the gold leaf mask as finger paint. That cost more than the 2026 Winter Festival donuts Gura ate this morning."

Gura finished with the bat and set the fluffy, dry Loot onto a stack of warm towels. He stood up and walked over to Riva, wrapping a massive, warm arm around his waist. "You’re too tense, purple. Even the bathroom feels like a strategy meeting." Gura leaned down, pressing his damp forehead against Riva's.

Riva sighed, the tension in his shoulders finally melting into the humid air. He reached up, his fingers tracing the line of Gura’s jaw. "I am merely... maintaining a baseline of order in a realm of chaos, Gura."

"Well, forget the order for five minutes," Gura grinned, his golden eyes bright. He

reached over and turned on the "Waterfall" shower head, the sound of the spray filling the room.

Loot dived from the towels and did a victory lap through the steam, his tiny shark hoodie dry and soft once more. Regina giggled, throwing a handful of lavender bath-bombs into the tub. "Shark Squad spa day! No villains allowed until our skin is radiant!"

As the 2026 January afternoon faded into twilight, the Shark Squad remained in their humid sanctuary—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the scent of lavender and the warmth of a family that stayed clean together.

&

The Port Huron boardwalk was a shimmering heat-haze of 88°F on this July afternoon in 2026. The Michigan humidity was a "statistical catastrophe" according to Riva, who had officially retired the plush shark onesies for the season in favor of something more "aerodynamically appropriate for a heatwave."

"I have calculated that the human obsession with 'beach-casual' is a ruse to lower our defensive posture," Riva remarked, adjusting his signature purple-tinted sunglasses. He was dressed in a tailored, short-sleeved linen shirt patterned with tiny, geometric shark fins. A wide-brimmed straw fedora sat perfectly on his head, accented by a violet silk band. "However, the cooling properties of high-grade flax are undeniable."

"Less talking, more ice cream!" Regina commanded. She was skipping ahead in a red sundress with a black shark-tooth hem, her blonde hair tied up in high pigtails with silver-grey ribbons. She stopped at a stall near the Blue Water Bridge, her eyes gleaming. "Loot, execute the flavor-reconnaissance mission!"

Loot the bat was the most festive of all. He was perched on Regina’s shoulder, wearing a custom-made 2026 "Summer-Bat" harness—a tiny, breathable mesh vest in bright red. He let out a sharp, rhythmic skree and dived toward a display of frozen mango popsicles.

Gura lumbered behind them, looking like a tropical titan. He had traded his heavy grey fleece for a massive, unbuttoned Hawaiian shirt featuring great white sharks surfing on waves of fire. His grey cargo shorts were sagging under the weight of "emergency" snacks. "Riva, look! They have a 'Shark-Bite' slushie that turns your tongue blue. It’s like we’re branding the locals!"

Gura leaned down, his voice a low, gravelly vibration as he pressed his shoulder against Riva’s. "You look sharp, purple. Almost too sharp for a public pier."

Riva huffed, though he reached out and surreptitiously wiped a drop of sweat from Gura’s temple with a silk handkerchief. "Someone in this 2026 squad must maintain

an aura of aristocratic menace, Gura. You merely look like a very hungry tourist."

"A tourist who’s gonna buy you a frozen lemonade," Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the 2026 sun. He reached down and took Riva’s hand, their fingers interlocking—hot and a little sticky, but solid.

The four of them huddled under a large purple umbrella near the water. Loot was busy face-planting into a slice of chilled watermelon, his tiny summer-vest dusted with seeds. Regina was busy braiding seagrass into a "Crown of the Deep" for her stuffed shark.

"Riva?" Gura murmured, leaning back against the cool wood of the bench.

"Mmm?"

"I think I like summer-Riva even better than onesie-Riva."

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s salt-dusted shoulder, the 2026 summer wind ruffling his linen sleeves. "Statistically, Gura, your flattery is transparent. But... I find the sentiment acceptable."

As the July sun began to dip toward the Lake Huron horizon, the Shark Squad sat in the warmth—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the scent of SPF 50 and the simple, summer joy of being the biggest predators on the beach.

&

The violet moonlight of the Shadow Realm filtered through the high, arched windows of the palace on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026. Inside Riva’s private chambers, the air was heavy with the scent of lavender and the soft, rhythmic hum of a guttering candle. The frantic energy of their earlier connection had settled into a profound, weighted stillness.

Riva lay draped across the velvet pillows, his purple silk shirt discarded on the floor. His eyes were half-closed, his chest rising and falling in a slow, steady cadence. Beside him, Gura was a mountain of radiant heat, his massive arm draped protectively across Riva’s waist, pinning him to the mattress with a comforting, immovable weight.

"Statistically," Riva whispered, his voice a mere silken rasp in the quiet room, "the probability of us finding this level of... tranquility... in a realm built on discord is nearly zero."

Gura let out a low, rumbling hum deep in his chest—a sound more felt than heard. He shifted closer, his forehead resting against the curve of Riva’s shoulder. "Forget the numbers, purple," Gura mumble-grunted, his voice sleep-thickened and warm. "Just stay here. The world hasn't ended yet."

Riva reached out, his slender fingers tracing the line of Gura’s calloused knuckles. The physical contrast was a study in 2026-weary elegance versus raw power, yet in this moment, they were perfectly balanced. The silence wasn't the cold silence of the Shadow Realm, but a protective cocoon they had built for themselves.

"You’re too warm, you brute," Riva murmured, though he leaned back into Gura’s embrace, his eyes finally fluttering shut. He felt Gura’s breath, steady and hot, against his neck—a grounding reminder that he wasn't alone in the dark.

Loot the bat, sensing the shift in the room's energy, fluttered down from the rafters and landed softly on the heap of silk blankets at the foot of the bed. He let out a tiny, contented skree and began to groom his wing, his tiny shark-hoodie sleeves messy from the day's excitement.

As the afternoon light faded into the deep indigo of the 2026 winter evening, the two villains drifted in the afterglow of their shared devotion. They weren't generals or predators in this room; they were simply two souls who had found a home in each other's arms.

"I love you, Gura," Riva whispered into the shadows.

Gura’s only answer was to tighten his grip, pulling Riva flush against his heart as they both surrendered to the peace.

&

The Port Huron Winter Carnival was a kaleidoscope of neon lights and freezing Lake Huron wind on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026. The temperature hovered at a crisp 27°F, but the Shark Squad was currently "undercover" near the Blue Water Bridge, moving through the crowds with the subtle grace of a tidal wave.

"Statistically, the probability of winning that giant plush penguin is less than three percent," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple-tinted sunglasses. He was draped in his signature purple shark onesie, though he had added a high-fashion violet scarf to combat the Michigan chill. "It is a psychological trap for the weak-willed, Gura."

"I’m not weak-willed, I’m hungry for victory!" Gura roared. He looked like a massive grey-fleece mountain in his unzipped shark onesie, clutching a steaming tray of deep-fried Oreos. He handed one to Riva, who took it with the theatrical caution of someone handling a live grenade. "Eat it, purple. It’ll give you the energy to help me cheat at the ring toss."

Regina was already halfway up the "Ice-Slide," her red shark hood flapping in the wind. "I’m the Queen of the Tundra! Loot, execute the aerial reconnaissance! Find the stand with the 'Shark-Sized' hot chocolate!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom 2026

"Winter-Bat" parka over his tiny shark hoodie, looking like a fuzzy brown fighter pilot. He dived through the steam of the concession stands, returning to land on Gura’s head with a tiny, marshmallow-scented chirp of triumph.

The squad moved toward the Ferris wheel as the sun began to dip over the 2026 horizon. They claimed a gondola to themselves, the four of them squeezed into the small, swaying space. As they rose above the carnival, the lights of Port Huron stretched out beneath them like a carpet of fallen stars.

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the heat from the fried Oreos and the big man’s massive frame finally making him relax. "I suppose... the sensory input is acceptable," Riva murmured.

Gura wrapped a massive, fleece-covered arm around Riva and Regina, pulling them into a crushing hug. "It’s better than the Shadow Realm, isn't it?" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency.

"Statistically? Yes," Riva whispered, his hand finding Gura’s in the dark.

As the Ferris wheel reached the apex, a 2026 winter firework blossomed over the St. Clair River—a massive flower of gold and violet. Loot chirped from the railing, his tiny wings reflecting the light.

In the heart of the Michigan winter, the Shark Squad sat in silence—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the cold air and the warmth of a family that conquered carnivals together.

&

The Port Huron hideout was silent, save for the rhythmic hiss of the radiator fighting against the 26°F Michigan freeze outside. It was Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026, and the frantic energy of the week's battles had finally ebbed, leaving behind a heavy, domestic stillness.

Riva sat on the edge of the bed, his purple shark onesie unzipped to the waist. He had discarded his top hat and monocle, looking unusually fragile in the dim light of the afternoon. Gura sat on the floor between Riva’s knees, his massive back leaning against the mattress.

"You’re too quiet, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low vibration that Riva could feel through the bedframe. "The gears in your head are grinding loud enough to wake Regina."

"The variable of our survival is... fluctuating, Gura," Riva whispered, his slender fingers trembling as they traced the seam of Gura’s grey fleece shoulder. "Statistically, we are anomalies. We shouldn't exist in a world this bright."

Gura didn't argue with logic. He never did. Instead, he reached up, took Riva’s hand,

and pressed it flat against the center of his own chest.

"Stop calculating," Gura commanded softly. "Just listen."

Riva froze. Beneath the thick grey fleece and the heavy muscle of Gura’s chest, he felt it: a slow, powerful, and utterly steady thump-thump, thump-thump. It was a rhythmic drum that didn't care about statistics or the Shadow Realm or the year 2026. It was the sound of a predator at rest, a grounding force that acted as an anchor for Riva’s spiraling thoughts.

Riva leaned down, eventually pressing his ear directly against Gura’s chest. He closed his eyes, letting the sound fill his head. Every beat was a physical reassurance—a promise that as long as this heart was beating, Riva had a home.

"It's so slow," Riva murmured, his breath warming the grey fleece. "Compared to mine... it’s like a mountain breathing."

Gura reached up, his massive hand gently cupping the back of Riva’s head, holding him there. "It only beats this way when you're around. Otherwise, it’s just looking for the next fight."

Loot the bat, sensing the shift in the room, fluttered down from the rafters and landed softly on Riva’s shoulder. He tucked his tiny head against Riva’s neck, his own minuscule heartbeat adding a frantic, bird-like counterpoint to Gura’s steady drum.

For a long time, the only sound in the room was the three of them breathing in unison. Riva felt the tension drain from his limbs, his own heart eventually slowing to match the rhythm beneath his ear.

"Better?" Gura asked, his voice a low, private frequency.

"Statistically... yes," Riva whispered, a rare, genuine smile tugging at his lips. "It is the only variable that matters."

As the 2026 January sun dipped below the Michigan horizon, the Shark Squad remained in the dark—a strategist, a brute, and a bat—unified by the simple, powerful rhythm of a heart that beat for them all.

&

The Port Huron Dairy Queen was experiencing a typical Sunday rush on January 18, 2026, until the automatic doors hissed open to admit the Shark Squad. The Michigan air outside was a biting 26°F, but Regina had decreed that a "proper shark" doesn't care about the thermostat when there are sprinkles involved.

"Statistically, the consumption of frozen dairy in sub-zero temperatures is a biological paradox," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple-tinted sunglasses as he

surveyed the menu. He was dressed in his signature purple shark onesie, though he had added a high-fashion violet scarf. "However, the sugar-to-fat ratio in a 'Blizzard' is undeniably efficient fuel."

"I don't want a blizzard, I want the Mega-Shark-Sunder!" Regina commanded, pointing a gloved finger at a limited-edition 2026 winter special. She was wearing her red shark hood, her blonde hair flying as she dragged Gura toward the counter. "Loot, check the topping levels! If I see a single empty spot, I'm turning the freezer into a block of ice!"

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, let out a deep, rumbling laugh. "Princess, if it's got chocolate, I'm the man for the job." He was holding a tray of four "Triple-Chocolate" cones, two of which were already half-gone.

In his breast pocket, Loot the bat was vibrating with pure adrenaline. He poked his nose out, his onyx eyes reflecting the bright neon lights. Riva reached in and discreetly offered the bat a tiny, frozen strawberry from his own cup. Loot let out a muffled skree of triumph, his tiny shark-hoodie sleeves fluttering.

They claimed a booth by the window, where the 2026 Michigan snow was beginning to drift against the glass. The "Mega-Shark-Sundae" arrived: a towering mountain of soft-serve, blue raspberry syrup, chocolate "fins," and an entire canister's worth of whipped cream.

"Observe the structural instability," Riva sighed, though he surreptitiously reached over and swiped a dollop of cream with his finger. He looked at Gura, who was currently attacking a hot fudge brownie with the intensity of a predator. "Gura, you have chocolate on your nose. It is a tactical disaster."

Gura didn't use a napkin. He leaned over and gave Riva a quick, cocoa-scented kiss on the cheek. "Now you have chocolate on your face too, purple. Shared disaster."

Riva's face flushed a deep violet that matched his onesie. "You are an impossible creature, Gura."

Regina was busy using her spoon to build a "Trench of Caramel" around the sundae. "I'm the Queen of the Cold! Loot, execute the cherry-retrieval mission!"

Loot dived from Gura's pocket, snatched the maraschino cherry from the peak, and did a victory lap around the booth, his tiny wings reflecting the 2026 winter sun.

As the afternoon light faded over the Blue Water Bridge, the Shark Squad sat in a comfortable sugar-haze—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the cold treats and the warmth of a family that stayed together, even when their tongues were turned blue by raspberry syrup.

"Riva?" Gura muffled.

"Yes, Gura?"

"I think I need a second sundae."

Riva smiled, closing his eyes as he leaned against Gura’s warm shoulder. "Statistically, Gura, your appetite is the only 'Never-Ending' thing in this world. Let's go."

&

The Port Huron hideout was silent, the Michigan winter of Sunday, January 18, 2026, held at bay by the thick stone walls and the heavy steam rising from the master bathroom. Outside, the temperature had dropped to a bitter 21°F, but inside, the air was tropical, smelling of cedarwood and the expensive lavender oils Riva had insisted on "liberating" from the local spa.

The sunken marble tub was a sea of slowly shifting bubbles. Riva sat against the backrest, his head resting on a rolled silk towel. Without his top hat and violet armor, he looked strikingly elegant—his pale skin flushed a soft lilac from the heat.

Gura sat opposite him, a massive, grounding presence that displaced half the water. He had been quiet for a long time, his golden eyes fixed on Riva with a look of raw, uncalculated devotion that was rare even for them.

"You're thinking again, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, watery vibration that echoed off the tiles. "I can see the gears turning behind your eyes."

"Statistically, Gura," Riva whispered, his voice a mere silken rasp in the steam, "the probability of a moment like this lasting in our world is... infinitesimal. I am merely trying to memorize the thermal gradient."

Gura didn't respond with logic. He moved through the water with a slow, heavy grace, closing the distance until he was kneeling between Riva’s legs. He reached out, his large, calloused hands coming to rest on Riva’s damp shoulders. The contrast was stark: Riva’s slender, porcelain frame against Gura’s dark, powerful bulk.

Gura’s touch was incredibly mindful of his own strength. He began to massage Riva’s shoulders, his thumbs working in slow, rhythmic circles that pulled the last of the 2026 tension from Riva’s muscles.

"Don't memorize the numbers," Gura murmured, leaning in until their foreheads touched. "Memorize this."

The lovemaking that followed was slow and deliberate, dictated by the rhythmic lap of the water against the marble. It was a study in patience and pleasure. Gura’s hands were everywhere—tracing the line of Riva’s throat, the curve of his ribs, the sensitive skin behind his ears—each touch a silent 2026 vow of loyalty.

Riva arched into the contact, a soft, breathless moan escaping his throat and echoing in the humid air. He reached up, his wet fingers tangling in Gura’s thick hair, pulling him closer until there was no air left between them. In the sanctuary of the steam, the "theatrical strategist" was gone, replaced by a man who was entirely, vulnerably in love.

"Gura," Riva breathed, his eyes fluttering shut as he felt the steady, powerful thrum of Gura’s heart against his own. "I love you. More than the shadows."

Gura tightened his hold, his arms a warm, immovable cage. "I’ve got you, Riva. Always."

As the 2026 January twilight deepened outside, the two villains remained in their private, steaming world. They weren't fighting for a king or a kingdom; they were simply two souls, finally and completely home in the warmth of each other’s arms.

&

The violet moonlight of the Shadow Realm filtered through the high stone windows of the palace on this Sunday afternoon, January 18, 2026. Inside Riva’s private chambers, the air was still and thick with the scent of lavender oil.

Riva sat on a low velvet stool, his purple silk shirt draped open to reveal the base of his translucent, violet-tinged bat wings. Usually, these wings were a source of theatrical pride, but today they were twitching with a rhythmic, sharp ache—a "statistical nightmare" of a cramp brought on by a week of high-altitude reconnaissance over Port Huron.

"The tension is... statistically unbearable, Gura," Riva whispered, his head bowed, his hands clutching the edge of the stool.

Gura stepped out of the shadows, his massive frame unburdened by his usual heavy coat. He sat on a bench behind Riva, a mountain of grounding heat. He didn't say a word; he simply reached out, his large, calloused hands coming to rest at the very top of Riva’s wings—the sensitive, velvety spot just behind the base of his ears.

"Relax, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency that Riva could feel in his own chest. "I’ve got you."

Gura’s thumbs began to move in slow, deliberate circles. He was incredibly mindful of his strength, applying just enough pressure to soothe the tight muscles without bruising the delicate membrane. He worked his way into the hollows behind Riva's ears, where the wing-tendons attached to the skull.

"Oh," Riva exhaled, a soft, involuntary sound escaping his throat. His eyes fluttered shut, and his head lulled back, resting against Gura’s broad chest. "Right there, you brute. Don't stop."

Gura shifted his grip, his fingers tracing the delicate "fingers" of the bat wings, sliding over the sensitive purple skin with the reverence of a man handling a rare treasure. He used the heat of his palms to melt the stiffness away, his touch grounding Riva in the present and drowning out the noise of 2026.

As the massage deepened, Riva’s wings finally went limp, draped like silk curtains over Gura’s arms. Riva turned slightly, his face flushed, looking up at the man who was his only true anchor in a world of shadows.

"You have a... surprisingly sophisticated touch for someone who usually smashes things," Riva murmured, his fingers reaching up to brush the hair from Gura's forehead.

Gura grinned, his golden eyes reflecting the candlelight. "I only smash the things that aren't you, Riva."

He leaned down, pressing a soft, lingering kiss to the spot he had just massaged behind Riva’s ear. Riva let out a long, shuddering sigh of contentment, his hands finding Gura’s as the January afternoon faded into a quiet, shared twilight.

In the sanctuary of the palace, the Shark Squad's finest were finally at peace—unified by a bond that was, as Riva would say, statistically perfect.

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The Port Huron hideout was a sea of blue-lit shadows on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan temperature had plummeted to a bone-chilling 22°F, but the interior was a tropical paradise of 2026 technology and high-calorie snacks.

"The frame rate on this projector is statistically superior to the one in the Shadow Realm," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark onesie. He was meticulously arranging a plate of chilled mango slices, his top hat perched on a nearby pile of blankets. "However, the plot of this 'Shark-Nado' franchise is an insult to the very concept of atmospheric science."

"Who cares about science? The shark just ate a Ferris wheel!" Gura roared, his massive grey-fleece frame shaking with laughter. He was sprawled across the oversized sofa, a "Party Size" bowl of white cheddar popcorn balanced on his chest. He reached over and pulled Riva into his side, the polyester of their shark suits creating a soft, static-filled friction.

Regina was tucked into the crook of Gura’s other arm, her red shark hood pulled up so only her eyes and a few blonde bangs were visible. She was holding a 2026 limited-edition "Baja Blast" slushie that had turned her lips a vibrant Mercenare blue. "I like the part where the humans scream," she noted with a satisfied hum. "Loot, look! That shark is as fast as you!"

Loot the bat was the self-appointed king of the popcorn bowl. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, his tiny wings dusted with cheddar powder. He let out a sharp, rhythmic skree as a shark on screen executed a particularly dramatic mid-air maneuver. He snatched a popcorn kernel and dived into the "mouth" of Gura’s grey hood to eat it in peace.

"The pacing is atrocious," Riva continued, though he didn't pull away when Gura shifted to press a warm, salt-scented kiss to his temple. "However, I find the protagonist's irrational bravado to be... mildly entertaining. It reminds me of you, Gura, during the 2026 Winter Pancake Festival."

"Hey! I was a hero at that festival," Gura grunted, his hand finding Riva’s under the heavy duvet. He squeezed Riva’s fingers, his large palm a grounding heat against the Michigan winter. "And I'm a hero now for finding the remote. Admit it, purple. You’re having fun."

Riva sighed, leaning his head against Gura’s shoulder. "Statistically, Gura, my enjoyment levels are currently at an all-time high for 2026. But do not expect me to watch the sequel."

"There are six sequels, Riva," Regina smirked, her eyes gleaming in the blue light. "And we’re watching all of them."

As the 2026 January night deepened over the Blue Water Bridge, the Shark Squad huddled together—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. Unified by the flickering screen and the scent of popcorn, they were perfectly, shark-fully at home in the dark.

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The neon pulse of "The Deep End," Port Huron’s most exclusive underground club, thrummed through the floorboards on this Sunday night, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan air was a biting 19°F, but inside, the atmosphere was a humid, ultraviolet fever dream.

"I have calculated that the BPM of this 'dubstep' is designed to induce a state of rhythmic hypnosis," Riva remarked, leaning against the VIP railing. He had traded his onesie for a sleek, violet silk blazer with glowing amethyst lapels. He adjusted his purple-tinted shades, his silver-topped cane tapping in perfect time with the bass. "Statistically, it is the most efficient way to drain the humans of their cognitive focus."

"Less talking, more grooving, purple!" Gura roared over the music. He looked like a clubland titan in a sleeveless grey hoodie that showed off his massive, scarred arms. He was currently holding a glowing blue cocktail in each hand. He bumped his hip against Riva’s, a grin spreading across his face. "Even the Shark Squad needs to blow off some steam in 2026!"

Regina was already in the center of the dance floor, illuminated by a circle of strobes. She was wearing a red-and-black sequined dress that shimmered like shark scales. "Look at me!" she commanded, her laughter cutting through the heavy bass. "I’m the Queen of the Rave! Loot, execute the strobe-sync!"

Loot the bat was the undisputed star of the VIP lounge. He was wearing a custom 2026 "Neon-Shark" harness encrusted with glow-in-the-dark studs. He dived from the rafters, his wings catching the ultraviolet light as he did a series of acrobatic loops above Regina’s head. He let out a sonic skree that blended perfectly with the high-frequency synths of the track.

Gura set the drinks down and grabbed Riva’s hand, pulling the "theatrical strategist" toward the edge of the floor. "Come on, Riva. One dance. I promise I won't step on your designer boots."

Riva sighed, but the way Gura’s golden eyes glowed in the blacklight made his pulse quicken. "Very well, you brute. But if someone attempts to start a 'mosh pit,' I am deploying the Distains."

They moved together in the shadows. It was a study in 2026-style contrasts: Riva’s sharp, elegant movements against Gura’s powerful, rhythmic swaying. Gura pulled Riva flush against his chest, his large hands resting on Riva’s waist. The heat between them was more intense than the club’s lasers.

"You’re a surprisingly good lead when you aren't distracted by meat," Riva whispered, leaning his head against Gura’s shoulder.

"I'm always focused on the best prize in the room," Gura rumbled, his voice a low vibration beneath the music. He leaned down and pressed a firm, salt-and-lime-tasting kiss to Riva’s lips.

Regina joined them, spinning between them and grabbing their hands. "Shark Squad! Group dance! Now!"

As the clock ticked toward midnight on this January night in 2026, the four of them formed a unified circle of purple, grey, and red. Surrounded by the humans of Port Huron, they were the biggest predators on the floor—a princess, two monsters, and a bat, perfectly, rhythmically at home in the dark.

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The Port Huron hideout was finally silent, the frantic energy of their Sunday adventures yielding to the heavy chill of a Michigan night. It was 11:15 PM on Sunday, January 18, 2026, and the temperature outside had dropped to a biting 18°F. Inside, the radiator hissed a tired, rhythmic tune, but the real warmth was concentrated in the center of the master suite.

“The thermal distribution is currently skewed toward the right side of the mattress, Gura,” Riva remarked, though his voice was a drowsy, silken whisper. He was already tucked into the "Shark Huddle," dressed in his purple shark onesie. He had discarded his top hat and monocle, his violet hair fanned out against the silk pillows like a spilled inkwell.

Gura let out a low, rumbling hum of agreement—a sound that vibrated through the entire bedframe. He was a massive mountain of grey fleece, his heavy arm draped protectively across the middle of the bed. “Stop calculating the heat and just lean in, purple. You’re shivering.”

Regina was a quiet, red-fleece heap between them. She was sprawled diagonally, her head resting on Gura’s bicep while her feet were tucked under Riva’s side for warmth. She had spent the day at the 2026 Winter Carnival, and the sheer exhaustion of being a princess had finally claimed her.

Loot the bat was the final piece of the 2026 cuddle-puzzle. He had abandoned his velvet roost for the night, preferring the "mouth" of Gura’s grey shark hood. He was tucked into the fleece, his tiny wings wrapped tight around his fuzzy body, letting out a soft, rhythmic skree with every breath.

“She’s taking up seventy percent of the blankets,” Riva murmured, though he didn't move. He leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the polyester of their shark suits creating a soft, static-filled friction.

Gura shifted, pulling a heavy, weighted quilt up over the entire squad. “She’s the Princess. She gets the space. You get the heart.” Gura leaned down, his forehead resting against Riva’s in the dark. In the quiet of this 2026 winter night, away from the Glitter Force and the Shadow Realm, the "brute" looked entirely at peace.

“I love you, Gura,” Riva whispered, the confession muffled by Gura’s fleece shoulder. “Even if you do take up the entire center of the bed.”

“Love you too, purple,” Gura rumbled, his eyes closing as he pulled Riva flush against his side.

As the clock ticked toward midnight, the Shark Squad was still. The only sounds were the radiator’s hiss and the synchronized breathing of a princess, two monsters, and a bat—all safe within the only world that mattered, wrapped in shark-fleece and the silence of the Michigan winter.

&

The sky over Port Huron was a bruised shade of violet on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. The temperature had plummeted to 21°F, and the snow was falling in heavy, crystalline sheets. The Glitter Force stood at the edge of the Pine Grove Park boardwalk, their hearts glowing with the familiar, shimmering light of

friendship.

"It’s over, Mercenares!" Glitter Heart shouted, her hand extended. "Love is the greatest power in the universe! It can overcome any shadow!"

Riva stood atop a frozen fountain, his purple shark onesie dusted with snow. He adjusted his monocle, a sharp, theatrical smirk playing on his lips. "Statistically, Heart, your speeches are becoming ninety percent redundant. However, you are correct about one variable."

He looked back at Gura, who was standing behind him like a mountain of grey fleece, and Regina, who was perched on Gura’s shoulder with Loot nestled in her red shark hood.

"You think you’re the only ones who know about love?" Regina laughed, her voice sharp as the Michigan wind. "We’re the Shark Squad! We don't need your 'glitter' to be a family!"

"ENGAGE PROTOCOL: SHARK BOND," Riva commanded.

In a surge of dark, yet strangely warm energy, the three villains didn't summon a Distain. Instead, they stood in a unified circle. Riva took Gura’s massive, calloused hand, and Regina placed her hand over their joined palms.

The light that erupted from them wasn't pink or gold; it was a deep, resonating amethyst and slate grey. It was the power of a strategist who found his anchor, a brute who found his heart, and a princess who found a home.

"SHARK SQUAD PULSE!" they roared in unison.

A wave of pure, concentrated devotion rippled outward, clashing with the Glitter Force’s beam. It wasn't fueled by a desire to save the world, but by the fierce, selfish need to protect each other. The impact sent a shockwave across the St. Clair River, cracking the ice.

When the smoke cleared, the Glitter Force was pushed back, their eyes wide with shock. "Their power..." Glitter Diamond whispered. "It’s not just negative energy. It’s... something else."

Riva straightened his purple hood, his breathing heavy but his eyes bright. Gura stepped forward, pulling Riva and Regina into a crushing, protective embrace. Loot let out a triumphant skree, his tiny wings glowing with the lingering spark of their bond.

"We aren't fighting for your 'Happy Ending,' Heart," Riva called out, his voice echoing in the 2026 night. "We’re fighting for ours."

With a snap of Riva's fingers, the Squad vanished into a swirl of shadows and snow,

leaving the heroes standing in the cold. Back in the warmth of their hideout, huddled under a mountain of quilts with a bowl of heated mangoes, the Shark Squad sat in silence.

"That was... statistically impressive," Riva whispered, leaning his head on Gura's shoulder.

"It was love, purple," Gura rumbled, squeezing him tight. "Shark love."

Regina yawned, tucking Loot into the fleece. "Whatever it was, it made me hungry. Gura, go get the leftover pizza."

In the heart of the 2026 winter, the Shark Squad was safe—unified by a power that the Glitter Force would never truly understand.

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The Port Huron hideout was bathed in the flickering amber glow of the fireplace on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan wind whipped off the St. Clair River at a biting 19°F, but inside, Riva had decided that the "Shark Squad" required a lesson in 2026-level elegance.

"Statistically, the rhythmic coordination of a ballroom dance is the ultimate display of tactical unity," Riva remarked. He had shed his purple shark onesie for the night, opting instead for a violet silk robe that billowed around his ankles. He adjusted a stolen human record player, and the soft, brassy swell of a slow jazz standard filled the room.

Gura stood in the center of the rug, looking massive in his grey shark fleece. He looked at his own large, calloused hands, then back at Riva. "Riva, I’m a predator, not a ballerina. I’m more likely to step on your toes than lead a parade."

"You won't step on anything, you brute. Just follow my lead," Riva murmured, stepping into Gura’s space. He placed one hand on Gura’s broad shoulder and took Gura’s massive hand in his own.

As they began to move, the contrast was a study in 2026-weary grace. Riva was lithe and fluid, guided by the music, while Gura provided a solid, unmoving center of gravity. Slowly, Gura’s movements smoothed out, his heavy boots finding a gentle, swaying rhythm that matched Riva’s.

"See?" Riva whispered, leaning his head against Gura’s chest. "Your internal metronome is surprisingly precise."

"It's just following your heartbeat, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low vibration that Riva could feel through his silk robe. He pulled Riva closer, his arm wrapping around the smaller man’s waist like a protective iron band.

Regina watched from the sofa, her red shark hood pulled up. She wasn't mocking them for once; instead, she was holding Loot the bat, moving him back and forth in a miniature dance of her own. "Look, Loot! They’re like two sharks circling a snack, but... slower."

Loot let out a soft, melodic skree. He was wearing his tiny shark hoodie, his wings unfurled as he dived from Regina’s hand. He began to circle the dancing pair, his wings catching the firelight as he performed slow, graceful loops in the air above them.

The 2026 winter night seemed to pause outside the glass. For a few minutes, there were no Glitter Force battles, no King Mercenare, and no looming shadows. There was only the warmth of the fire, the soft hiss of the record, and the steady, rhythmic sway of four souls who had found their own version of peace.

Riva closed his eyes, his fingers tangling in the grey fleece of Gura’s shoulder. "I love you, Gura," he breathed into the silence.

Gura leaned down, his chin resting atop Riva’s head. "I’ve got you, Riva. Always."

As the song faded into the crackle of the hearth, the Shark Squad remained locked in their embrace—a princess, two monsters, and a bat, perfectly, beautifully in step in the dark of a Michigan winter.

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The Port Huron hideout was a sanctuary of steam and lavender on the evening of Sunday, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan temperature had plummeted to a bone-chilling 19°F, but the Shark Squad had retreated into a world of high-thread-count luxury.

"Statistically, the absorption rate of Egyptian cotton is the only thing standing between us and a post-bath chill," Riva remarked, cinching the belt of his deep-violet silk bathrobe. It was embroidered with silver shark fins along the lapels, and he had topped the look with a matching velvet turban to protect his hair.

Gura emerged from the steam looking like a massive, fluffy cloud. He was wearing a grey terry-cloth robe that was several sizes too small, making him look even more hulking than usual. "I feel like I'm wearing a marshmallow, Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration. He sank into the oversized armchair, the wood groaning under his weight. "But it’s warm. I'll give you that."

Regina was already sprawled on the rug, wrapped in a bright red fleece robe with a jagged shark-tooth hem. "I’m the Queen of Coziness! Loot, fetch the heated slippers! The ones with the glitter!"

Loot the bat was the most pampered of all. Riva had crafted him a miniature "micro-

fleece" robe in charcoal grey, complete with tiny arm-holes for his wings. He let out a sharp, contented skree and dived into the pile of warm towels Regina had left by the radiator, looking like a tiny, winged cotton ball.

"Gura, you have a dollop of shaving cream behind your ear," Riva sighed, though he walked over and gently wiped it away with a silk cloth. He leaned down, pressing his forehead against Gura's. "You look... surprisingly domestic for a Mercenare general."

Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the 2026 firelight. He reached out and pulled Riva onto his lap, the silk and terry-cloth rubbing together with a soft shush. "Domestic looks good on us, purple. Better than armor."

Riva huffed, but he leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, closing his eyes. "Statistically, our productivity has dropped to zero. But... I find the comfort levels to be acceptable."

Regina looked up from her book of 2026 winter legends. "Shark Squad spa night! No villainy allowed until we're fully dry!"

As the January snow continued to fall over the Blue Water Bridge, the Shark Squad sat in the warmth—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—all wrapped in their robes and the quiet peace of a family that stayed cozy together.

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The Port Huron hideout was a sanctuary of thick, humid steam on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan temperature had plummeted to a bone-chilling 18°F, but the master washroom was a tropical oasis of lavender-scented bubbles and 2026-level luxury.

"Statistically, the surface tension of this foam is nearing its maximum capacity," Riva remarked, leaning back against the marble rim of the sunken tub. He had discarded his top hat and violet finery, looking unusually elegant as he sank into the waist-deep water. He wore a waterproof silk sleep-mask pushed up onto his forehead, his skin flushed a soft lilac from the heat.

Gura was a massive, bubbling mountain in the center of the tub. He had already piled enough suds on top of his head to create a three-foot-tall "shark fin" made of foam. "I'm a Great White Cloud, Riva!" Gura roared, his deep voice echoing off the tiles. He scooped up a handful of bubbles and blew them toward Riva, his golden eyes bright with a rare, goofy joy. "Don't tell me you can't calculate the fun in this."

Regina was sitting at the edge of the tub, her red shark onesie sleeves rolled up to her shoulders. She was busy using a gold-plated whisk to churn the water into even more froth. "I want it to look like a blizzard! Loot, execute the aerial bubble-dispersal!"

Loot the bat was the most adventurous of all. He was wearing his custom 2026 "Aero-Shark" life vest, a tiny piece of neon-red neoprene that kept him afloat. He didn't swim so much as "skitter," his wings flapping against the soapy surface like a wet moth. He dived into a pile of suds on Gura’s shoulder, emerging with a "beard" of bubbles and letting out a triumphant skree.

"Patience, you little gluttons," Riva sighed, though his eyes softened as he watched Gura try to balance a rubber shark on his nose. Riva reached out under the water, his hand finding Gura’s massive, wet palm. He squeezed it, the heat of the water making the connection feel even more profound.

Gura pulled Riva closer until their shoulders were touching amidst the foam. "You’re too tense, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, watery frequency. "Even the bath feels like a strategy meeting." He leaned over and gave Riva a quick, lavender-scented kiss on the temple.

Riva huffed, his face flushing a deep violet. "I am merely... maintaining a baseline of order. But... I find the thermal gradient to be acceptable."

Regina threw a handful of glowing 2026 bath-salts into the water, turning the bubbles a shimmering, iridescent purple. "Shark Squad Spa Night! No Glitter Force allowed until our skin is radiant!"

As the January sun dipped below the 2026 horizon, the Shark Squad drifted in their private, steaming sea—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the scent of lavender and the warmth of a family that stayed bubbly together.

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The Port Huron hideout was a fortress against the Michigan winter on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. Outside, the temperature had plummeted to a bone-chilling 19°F, but the master bedroom was a sanctuary of high-thread-count defiance.

Riva stood by the edge of the massive, custom-built bed, adjusting his monocle as he surveyed the "tactical fluff." He had spent the afternoon "liberating" several high-end weighted blankets and down comforters from a local 2026 winter expo.

"Statistically, the density of this goose-down should create a thermal pocket capable of sustaining us through a polar vortex," Riva remarked, smoothing a lavender silk sheet. He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, though he had added a pair of cashmere socks for "maximum foot-warmth."

Gura didn't bother with statistics. He let out a low, rumbling groan of anticipation and executed a slow-motion belly flop into the center of the mattress. The bed—reinforced with iron beams to support his Mercenare bulk—gave a soft, welcoming oomph.

"It’s like falling into a cloud made of steak," Gura muffled, his face buried in a pile of velvet pillows. He emerged, a stray feather stuck to his grey shark-hood. "Riva, get in here. The soft-levels are off the charts."

Regina was already a red-fleece blur, burrowing deep into the "valley" created by Gura’s weight. She popped her head out, clutching a plush shark that was nearly as big as she was. "I’m the Queen of the Cushion Kingdom! Loot, secure the perimeter!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, contented skree. He was wearing his miniature 2026 shark hoodie, and he had found the ultimate roost: a small, heated pet-pad tucked between two massive pillows. He performed a victory loop around the ceiling fan before landing and curling into a tiny, fuzzy ball of brown fur.

Riva finally surrendered to the gravity, sliding into the bed beside Gura. The transition from the cold air to the pre-heated blankets made him let out a long, shuddering sigh of relief.

Gura immediately shifted, pulling Riva into his side with a massive, fleece-covered arm. "You’re still too tense, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low vibration that seemed to melt the last of Riva's 2026 stress.

"I am... merely acclimating," Riva whispered, leaning his head against Gura’s shoulder. The mattress was so soft it felt as though they were floating. "Though I must admit, the tactile feedback is... acceptable."

"It's more than acceptable, it's perfect," Gura grunted, his eyes closing as he pulled the heavy, weighted quilt over the entire Squad.

As the January snow drifted against the glass of their 2026 hideout, the Shark Squad was still. A princess, two monsters, and a bat—all safe in a world of silk and down, unified by the silence of the Michigan winter and the warmth of a bed that felt like home.

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The Port Huron boardwalk was a landscape of swirling snow and salt-crusted wood on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. Most of the 2026 Winter Festival had packed up for the night, but the vintage carousel near the river remained lit—a spinning crown of gold and mirrors against the 19°F Michigan sky.

"I have analyzed the centripetal force of this archaic contraption," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple shark hood as he stepped onto the platform. "Statistically, the thrill-to-nausea ratio is negligible, yet I find the equestrian aesthetic... acceptable for a night of leisure."

"Stop talking like a textbook and get on a horse!" Regina shouted. She had already

claimed a bright red stallion, her red shark onesie blending with the painted wood. She gripped the brass pole like a scepter. "Loot, take the high ground! You’re the lookout!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, rhythmic skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 "Winter-Bat" parka, and he dived toward the center of the carousel, landing on the head of a mirrored lion. He looked like a fuzzy brown gargoyle, his tiny onyx eyes reflecting the thousands of flickering lights.

Gura lumbered toward a massive, grey-painted sea creature that looked remarkably like a shark. The wood groaned as he settled his massive frame into the seat. "I think this one’s my cousin, Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that harmonized with the carousel’s organ music.

Riva chose the elegant purple seahorse beside him. As the ride began to move, the world of 2026 became a blur of neon and frost.

"Look at us!" Gura laughed, his grey shark hood falling back to reveal his golden eyes. He reached across the gap between their mounts, his large, calloused hand finding Riva’s. "The Shark Squad is circling! We’re the predators of the merry-go-round!"

Riva squeezed Gura’s hand, the cold Michigan air biting at his cheeks, but the heat from Gura’s palm was a constant, grounding anchor. "Indeed, Gura. Though I suspect the 'predatory' nature is somewhat undermined by the fact that we are currently moving in a circle to the tune of a polka."

Regina threw her head back and laughed as they reached top speed. "Faster! I want to spin until we travel back to the Shadow Realm!"

Loot dived from the lion, circling the Squad like a tiny fighter pilot, his wings catching the gold and violet lights. In that moment, suspended between the icy St. Clair River and the 2026 stars, the Shark Squad wasn't a group of villains. They were just a family, unified by the music and the simple, spinning joy of being together.

As the carousel slowly ground to a halt, Gura leaned over and gave Riva a quick, cold-nosed kiss on the temple. "Best ride of 2026 so far, purple."

"Statistically? Yes," Riva whispered, a rare, genuine smile tugging at his lips. "The best."

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The Port Huron night was a jagged landscape of ice and wind on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. At the edge of the city, the Fort Gratiot Lighthouse stood as a solitary white sentinel against the 17°F Michigan sky. While the tourists had

long since retreated to their heated hotels, the Shark Squad had decided the lighthouse was the only vantage point high enough for their "2026 Winter Sovereignty Review."

"I have calculated that from this altitude, we can monitor every single hot chocolate stand within a five-mile radius," Riva remarked, his voice muffled by a thick violet scarf wrapped over his purple shark onesie. He leaned his silver-topped cane against the iron railing of the catwalk, his monocle fogging instantly in the freezing salt spray off Lake Huron.

"Forget the cocoa! I can see the bridge!" Regina shouted, her red shark hood pulled tight against the gale. She pointed a gloved finger at the Blue Water Bridge, its lights shimmering like a string of diamonds over the black water. "It looks like a giant shark jaw! Loot, execute the long-range scout! Tell me if you see any Glitter Force intruders hiding in the dunes!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, resonant skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 "Storm-Shark" flight harness, and he dived into the wind, his wings catching the rhythmic, rotating beam of the lighthouse. For a second, he was illuminated—a tiny, heroic brown blur—before vanishing back into the dark.

Gura stood with his back to the wind, his massive grey-fleece frame acting as a literal shield for Riva. He was currently holding a thermal bag filled with "Shark-Bite" spicy wings. "Riva, look at the ice floes," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that harmonized with the roar of the lake. "They look like teeth. The whole lake is a shark tonight."

Gura reached out, his massive, fleece-covered hand swallowing Riva’s. "You’re shivering, purple. Even for a strategist, this is a lot of 'ambiance.'"

"I am merely... acclimating to the 2026 climate," Riva huffed, though he leaned his head against Gura’s sturdy shoulder, the polyester of their shark suits creating a soft, static-filled warmth. "However, I find the elevation to be statistically superior to the pier."

Regina skipped around the catwalk, her laughter carried away by the wind. "Look! Loot found a seagull to bully!"

Loot returned, landing on the lighthouse railing with a triumphant chirp, holding a discarded red mitten in his feet. He presented it to Regina like a royal tribute.

As the great light of the tower swung around once more, it bathed the Squad in a momentary, brilliant white glow: a princess, two monsters, and a bat, unified at the top of the world.

"Riva?" Gura whispered, pulling him closer to block a sudden gust of snow.

"Yes, Gura?"

"Let's stay up here until the sun comes up. I want to see the 2026 dawn over the ice."

Riva smiled, closing his eyes as he listened to the steady, powerful rhythm of Gura's heart against the howl of the Michigan winter. "Statistically, Gura, we will be frozen solid by then. But... I find the plan acceptable."

In the heart of the 2026 winter, the Shark Squad remained at the summit—safe, together, and perfectly at home in the dark.

&

The Port Huron night was a wall of biting 16°F ice outside their hideout on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. Inside, the radiator was losing its battle against the Michigan frost, but the "Shark Squad" was currently preoccupied with a much hotter arrival: a 2026 "Mega-Carnivore" pizza from a local shop near the Blue Water Bridge.

"Statistically, the grease-to-crust ratio of this human delicacy is a cardiovascular nightmare," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple-tinted sunglasses. He was meticulously using a silver pizza cutter to divide the pie into precise, geometric triangles. He wore his signature purple shark onesie, though he had added a silk napkin over his lap to protect the fleece.

"Forget the math, Riva! Look at the pepperoni!" Gura roared, his grey shark-hood falling over his eyes as he leaned over the box. He was a mountain of hungry grey fleece, his golden eyes reflecting the shimmering oil on the cheese. "It's like a spicy coral reef! I'm going into a feeding frenzy!"

Regina was already sitting on the floor, her red shark hood pulled up as she pointed a gloved finger at the side of the box. "I want the ones with the extra olives! And I want the dipping sauce that turns your tongue red! Loot, execute the crust-reconnaissance mission!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he dived from the rafters, landing on the edge of the box. He carefully sniffed a rogue piece of sausage before looking up at Gura with a hopeful chirp.

"He's a predator, Riva! He needs the meat!" Gura chuckled, reaching out a massive hand to offer Loot a tiny, hand-shredded piece of ham. He looked over at Riva, his voice dropping into a low, gravelly vibration. "You're being too polite, purple. If you don't grab a slice now, Regina and I are gonna leave you with nothing but the cardboard."

Riva sighed, but he elegantly picked up a slice of the “2026 Special,” the molten cheese stretching in a long, golden thread. He took a bite, his eyes widening behind his shades. “Hmm. The flavor profile is... aggressively savory. I find the caloric density to be acceptable for a winter campaign.”

Gura didn't use a napkin. He folded a whole slice and vanished it in two bites. “Best mission of 2026 so far,” Gura muffled, his face smeared with a bit of tomato sauce. He leaned over and gave Riva a quick, oregano-scented kiss on the cheek. “Now you’re a messy shark too.”

Riva’s face flushed a deep violet that matched his onesie. “You are an impossible creature, Gura. A grease-stained, gluttonous disaster.”

Regina was busy dipping her crusts into a pool of garlic butter. “Shark Squad Pizza Night! No Glitter Force allowed until the box is empty!”

As the January sun dipped below the frozen St. Clair River, the Shark Squad sat in a comfortable food-coma—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the scent of garlic and the warmth of a family that stayed together, even when their fingers were covered in pizza sauce.

“Riva?” Gura whispered, leaning his heavy head on Riva's shoulder.

“Yes, Gura?”

“I think there’s one more meatball left.”

Riva smiled, closing his eyes. “Statistically, Gura, your stomach is a bottomless abyss. Go ahead. Eat it.”

&

The Port Huron hideout was a landscape of crinkling cellophane and neon-colored sugar on this Sunday night, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan temperature had plummeted to a bone-chilling 17°F, but the Shark Squad was currently neck-deep in a "tactical sugar raid" from a local 2026 winter candy expo.

"The artificial dye levels in these 'Neon-Shark' gummies are statistically sufficient to power a Distain for a week," Riva remarked. He was using silver sugar-tongs to pick out only the violet-colored candies, dropping them into a crystal bowl. He wore his signature purple shark onesie, his top hat replaced by a matching velvet beanie.

"Stop sorting and start chewing, Riva! These 'Blast-Off' sour belts are a challenge to my very existence!" Gura roared. The massive man was sitting in the center of a pile of grey fleece and discarded wrappers, his face dusted with the white sour-powder of a dozen "2026 Winter-Chill" belts. He looked like a giant, hungry shark in a sea of tart rainbows.

Regina was currently wearing a crown made of "Red-Raspberry" licorice coils. She was perched on the sofa, her red shark hood pulled up. "I’m the Queen of the Candy Kingdom! Loot, fetch the chocolate-covered mangoes! The ones with the gold foil!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he dived into the pile, emerging with a single, foil-wrapped treat clutched in his tiny feet. He performed a victory lap around the radiator before landing on Gura’s head, his wings flapping in a frantic, sugar-fueled rhythm.

"Careful, little thief," Gura rumbled, reaching up to gently pluck the candy from Loot's grasp. He peeled the foil and offered a piece to Riva. "Open up, purple. It’s got that 'sophisticated' dark chocolate you like."

Riva sighed, but he leaned in and took the bite. "The flavor profile is... acceptable. Though the caloric density is a statistical catastrophe." He reached over and wiped a smudge of sour-powder from Gura’s nose with a silk handkerchief. "And try not to choke, you brute. I haven't calculated the medical logistics of a 2026 sugar overdose."

Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the firelight. He leaned over and gave Riva a quick, strawberry-scented kiss on the cheek. "You're just cranky because Loot ate the last of the violet rock candy."

"Loot did what?!" Riva turned, his eyes wide.

Regina giggled, tossing a handful of "Shark-Bite" marshmallows at them. "Shark Squad Candy Night! No villains allowed until the Princess has a tummy ache!"

As the 2026 Michigan winter wind howled against the glass of the hideout, the Shark Squad sat in a comfortable, sticky heap—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. They were surrounded by wrappers and the scent of sugar, perfectly, happily, and shark-fully full.

&

The Port Huron night was a crystalline fortress of 16°F ice on this Sunday evening, January 18, 2026. At the summit of the Fort Gratiot Lighthouse, the wind off Lake Huron howled like a wounded Distain, but the Shark Squad was currently preoccupied with a "tactical maneuver" that had nothing to do with conquering Michigan.

"The wind-chill factor is currently a statistical insult to my dignity, Gura," Riva remarked, shivering within his purple shark onesie. He clutched his silver-topped cane, his monocle fogging with every sharp breath. "Why have we ascended this frozen pillar? I can monitor the 2026 Winter Festival's progress quite effectively from the heated interior of the car."

Gura stood with his back to the gale, his massive grey-fleece frame acting as a literal shield for Riva. He was unusually quiet, his golden eyes fixed on the rhythmic, rotating beam of the lighthouse. Regina stood beside him, her red shark hood pulled tight. She was vibrating with a rare, bratty excitement, holding Loot the bat firmly against her chest.

"Just... look at the bridge, Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that barely carried over the roar of the lake.

Riva turned. The Blue Water Bridge was a shimmering arc of lights over the black water, reflecting the first few streaks of a 2026 meteor shower. "The lighting is... acceptable," Riva admitted.

"It’s not about the bridge!" Regina snapped, unable to hold the secret a second longer. "Gura! Do the thing before Loot freezes into a bat-sicle!"

Gura took a deep breath, the grey polyester of his shark suit straining over his chest. He turned to face Riva, and for the first time in 2026, the brute looked nervous. He reached into the deep pocket of his onesie and pulled out a small, velvet box encrusted with tiny, sapphire-colored sharks.

Riva’s breath hitched. "Gura, if that is a chocolate-covered grape, I am going to be quite cross."

"It's not a grape," Gura grunted. He flipped the box open. Inside was a heavy silver band, carved to look like a Great White’s jaw, set with a single, deep-violet amethyst that glowed like Riva’s own eyes.

"Riva," Gura said, his voice dropping to a private, grounding frequency. "I’m a brute. I eat too much, I’m loud, and I’m probably gonna get us flattened by the Glitter Force one of these days. But... I don't want to be a shark without you. Statistically, or whatever. I love you, purple. Stay with the Squad? Forever?"

Riva froze. The theatrical strategist was gone, replaced by a man whose heart was currently beating a frantic, rhythmic counterpoint to the lighthouse light. He looked at the ring, then at the massive, grey-clad man who had become his entire world in 2026.

"You are an impossible creature, Gura," Riva whispered, a rare, genuine tear shimmering behind his monocle. He reached out, his gloved hand trembling as he took Gura’s. "But my calculations have consistently shown that my life without you is a zero-sum game. So... yes. The answer is... statistically inevitable."

"HE SAID YES!" Regina shrieked, throwing her glow-sticks into the air.

Loot let out a celebratory, sonic skree and dived from Regina’s arms. He circled the couple, his wings catching the lighthouse beam as he did a series of acrobatic loops.

Gura let out a roar of triumph, plucking the ring from the box and sliding it onto Riva’s finger. He then scooped Riva up into a crushing, fleece-covered hug, lifting him clean off the catwalk.

"I've got you, Riva!" Gura laughed, his deep voice echoing off the 2026 Michigan ice.

"Put me down, you brute! You’re going to drop the ring into the dunes!" Riva laughed back, wrapping his arms around Gura’s neck.

As the great light of the tower swung around once more, it bathed the Shark Squad in a momentary, brilliant white glow: a Duke, a Strategist, a Princess, and a Bat—finally, officially, and eternally together in the dark.

&

The Port Huron shoreline was a shimmering landscape of white frost and violet shadows on the evening of Sunday, January 18, 2026. The temperature had plummeted to a crisp 19°F, but the interior of the "Shark Squad" hideout—a refurbished Victorian ballroom overlooking the St. Clair River—was a sanctuary of heat and high-fashion malice.

"The structural integrity of this floral arch is statistically questionable, Gura, but the aesthetic impact is undeniable," Riva remarked, adjusting his silk cravat in the mirror.

Riva was a vision of Mercenare elegance. He had traded his shark onesie for a bespoke, deep-plum tuxedo with amethyst-encrusted shark-fin lapels. His silver-topped cane was adorned with a single white lily, and his monocle had been polished to a brilliant, 2026-level shine.

Gura stood at the end of the aisle, looking like a tectonic plate in a charcoal-grey frock coat. The fabric strained over his massive shoulders, and his golden eyes were uncharacteristically soft as he watched Riva approach. "You look... sharp, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that made the crystal chandeliers rattle. "Like a diamond. Or a really high-quality steak knife."

Regina served as the "Royal Officiant/Flower Princess." She wore a red-and-black ballgown with a ten-foot train, and she was currently using her dark energy to make black rose petals swirl in a rhythmic, mid-air vortex. "Loot, execute the ring-bearer protocol! Don't you dare drop them in the punch bowl!"

Loot the bat dived from the rafters, a blurred streak of brown fur. He was wearing a custom-made miniature tuxedo with a tiny purple bow tie. Clutched in his feet was a velvet cushion holding two heavy silver bands—one carved with shark teeth, the other set with a deep-violet amethyst. He landed perfectly on Gura’s shoulder, letting out a dignified, sonic skree.

The ceremony was short and distinctly Mercenare.

"Do you, Gura, promise to provide the muscle, the snacks, and the unwavering loyalty required to sustain this Squad through the 2026 campaign and beyond?" Regina asked, brandishing her scepter.

"I do," Gura grunted, taking Riva’s slender, gloved hand in his massive palm.

"And do you, Riva, promise to provide the strategy, the style, and the constant reminders that Gura is a brute, for as long as the Shadow Realm stands?"

"Statistically, it is the only logical path," Riva whispered, a rare, genuine smile tugging at his lips. "I do."

As they exchanged the silver rings, a brilliant streak of the 2026 Winter Meteor Shower slashed across the Michigan sky outside the high windows.

"I pronounce you the biggest predators in the sea!" Regina declared. "Now, cut the cake! I want the piece with the gold leaf!"

Gura didn't wait. He pulled Riva into a crushing, suit-straining embrace, leaning down to press a firm, 2026-vow of a kiss to Riva’s lips. The room erupted in a chaos of dark energy, bat-chirps, and Regina’s triumphant laughter.

As the January night deepened over the Blue Water Bridge, the Shark Squad sat at the head of a massive banquet table—a Duke, a Strategist, a Princess, and a Bat. They weren't fighting for a king; they were celebrating the only kingdom that mattered: the one they had built for each other in the heart of the winter.

&

The Port Huron hideout was nearly unrecognizable on this Sunday night, January 18, 2026. The Michigan winter outside was a brutal 17°F, but the master bedroom had been transformed into a literal ocean of polyester and fluff. After a final, highly successful raid on a local 2026 "Shark Week" clearance warehouse, the Shark Squad was currently submerged in a mountain of stuffed animals.

"Statistically, the mattress has reached its maximum weight-bearing capacity," Riva remarked. He was perched atop a giant, six-foot-long lavender plush shark, his purple onesie blending perfectly into the soft fabric. He adjusted his monocle, holding a clipboard to inventory the haul. "We are now living in a shark-based ecosystem, Gura. If we add one more oversized predator, the floorboards will likely surrender to the gravity of the fluff."

"The floor's fine, Riva! Look at the squish-factor on this one!" Gura roared. The massive man was buried up to his chin in a sea of grey, blue, and black plush sharks. He was currently hugging a particularly plump Great White that was wearing a tiny 2026 Winter Festival beanie. "He’s got a squeaker in his belly! It sounds like a

Distain being defeated!" Gura squeezed the toy, and a sharp, muffled honk echoed through the room.

Regina was currently face-down in a pile of crimson "Megalo-Plushies." She emerged, her red shark hood slightly askew, holding a plushie that looked remarkably like a round, angry bat. "This one is the Royal Guardian! Loot, come meet your plush double!"

Loot the bat let out a confused skree and dived into the pile. He emerged a second later, dragging a miniature plush mango that was almost as big as he was. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he immediately began to "roost" on top of Gura’s head, using the grey fleece hood as a nest amidst the sea of sharks.

"Loot has claimed the high ground," Riva sighed, though his eyes softened as he watched Gura try to balance a tiny plush hammerhead on each shoulder. "Gura, why is that predator wearing a tiny tuxedo? It is an aesthetic anomaly."

"Because it’s a Wedding Shark, Riva!" Gura laughed, his deep, rumbling voice making the plush mountain vibrate. He reached out and grabbed Riva’s hand, pulling the "theatrical strategist" down into the softness of the shark pile. "Relax, purple. It’s 2026. Everything is soft tonight."

Riva landed with a soft oomph against a giant, marshmallow-soft whale shark. He looked at the chaos—the sticky 2026 pancake crumbs on Gura’s chin, the princess crowned in felt fins, and the bat currently trying to groom a stuffed shark's tail.

"I suppose... the tactile feedback is acceptable," Riva murmured, finally letting go of the clipboard and leaning his head against Gura’s shoulder.

Gura wrapped a massive, fleece-covered arm around Riva and Regina, pulling them into the center of the plush fortress. "Best mission of 2026 so far, right?"

"Indeed," Riva whispered, closing his eyes as Loot settled into the crook of his neck.

As the January moon rose over the frozen St. Clair River, the Shark Squad sat in silence—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—all perfectly, warmly hidden in a world made of stuffing and love.

&

It is Sunday, January 18, 2026, and while the human calendar says it’s winter, Regina has decided that the "Mother’s Day of the Shadows" shall occur today. Her reasoning is simple: she is a princess, and she misses the idea of a mother’s doting affection—so she has decided that the Shark Squad will fill the void with "aggressive nurturing."

"Statistically, Regina, Mother’s Day is in May," Riva remarked, looking up from a complex knitting project. He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, meticulously

working on a violet shawl. "Attempting to celebrate it during a Michigan blizzard on January 18 is a chronological disaster."

"I don't care about the calendar! I want someone to make me tea and tell me I’m the most talented villain in the world!" Regina commanded, draped in her red shark onesie. She looked at Loot, who was hanging from the chandelier. "Loot, execute the 'Gift Retrieval' protocol! Gura is already in the kitchen!"

Gura lumbered into the room, looking like a grey-fleece mountain. He wasn't carrying a weapon; he was carrying a massive tray of "Mothering Muffins" he had baked using a 2026 5-star recipe he found on the human internet. "I put extra jam in the middle," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration. "Because mothers are sweet on the inside but tough on the outside. Like a nut."

Loot dived from the rafters, a blurred streak of brown fur. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and clutched in his feet was a single, slightly wilted flower he had scavenged from a local 2026 Winter Greenhouse. He dropped it onto Regina’s lap with a triumphant skree.

"See?" Regina cheered, hugging the bat. "Loot gets it! Now, Riva, read me a story where the mother is a giant shark that eats all the heroes."

Riva sighed, but the theatrical strategist couldn't hide the soft look in his eyes as he looked at his "family." He reached out and adjusted Gura’s grey shark hood, wiping a smudge of flour from the brute's nose. "Very well, Princess. But only if Gura agrees to share those muffins. Statistically, they are the only things keeping me from freezing in this 2026 draft."

The four of them huddled together on the oversized sofa—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. Gura pulled Riva and Regina into a massive, fleece-covered hug, the warmth of the muffins and their shared devotion acting as a shield against the January 18 Michigan frost.

"Happy Mother's Day, or whatever," Gura grunted, leaning his head against Riva's.

"It is a statistical anomaly," Riva whispered, leaning into Gura’s heat. "But... it is a pleasant one."

In the heart of the 2026 winter, the Shark Squad sat in silence, unified by a bond that didn't need a calendar to be real.

&

On this Sunday night, January 18, 2026, the Michigan frost was thick enough to turn the Port Huron hideout into a literal icebox. Inside, the radiator was clanking a desperate rhythm, but Regina was indifferent to the 19°F weather. She had decided that since King Mercenare was currently "logistically unavailable," the Shark Squad

would observe an emergency Father’s Day for the two men actually doing the parenting.

"Statistically, Regina, Father's Day is months away, and neither Gura nor I possess the biological credentials for the title," Riva remarked. He was draped in his purple shark onesie, meticulously polishing his monocle with a silk cloth. "However, the 2026 winter boredom is a variable that must be addressed."

"Quiet, Riva! You do the planning and Gura does the heavy lifting, so you're basically the 'Dads' of the Squad!" Regina commanded, pointing her scepter at the kitchen. "Loot, execute the Tribute Protocol! Gura, get out here!"

Gura lumbered into the room, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain. He was wearing his unzipped shark onesie over a t-shirt that Regina had modified with a permanent marker to read: WORLD’S HUNGRIEST DAD.

"I made the 'Dad-Platter,'" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that made the floorboards shake. He set down a massive tray of steak-wrapped jalapeño poppers and deep-fried pickles he’d mastered using a 2026 air-fryer. "It’s spicy, it’s meaty, and it’s probably a health hazard. Perfect for a holiday."

Loot the bat dived from the rafters, a blurred streak of brown fur. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and clutched in his tiny feet were two "gifts" he had liberated from a local Port Huron shop: a "Best Boss" mug for Riva and a giant, squeaky rubber steak for Gura. He dropped them with a triumphant skree and landed on Gura’s shoulder.

"Look!" Regina cheered, handing Riva a handmade card. It was a drawing of a purple shark and a grey shark holding hands while a red shark kicked a Glitter Force member in the distance. "It’s 2026, and we’re still the best squad in the sea. That’s thanks to you two."

Riva took the card, his theatrical composure finally cracking. He looked at the drawing, then at Gura, who was already offering him a popper with a look of raw, uncalculated pride.

"The artistic perspective is... statistically chaotic," Riva whispered, his voice softening as he leaned his head against Gura’s sturdy, fleece-covered shoulder. "But the sentiment is... acceptable. Quite acceptable."

Gura wrapped a massive arm around Riva and Regina, pulling them into a crushing, warm embrace that smelled of spice and home. "Happy Father's Day, purple," Gura grunted, leaning down to press a quick, salt-scented kiss to Riva’s temple.

"Happy 2026, you brute," Riva murmured, closing his eyes as Loot settled into the "mouth" of his purple hood.

As the January snow drifted against the glass of their Michigan sanctuary, the Shark Squad sat in silence—a princess, a bat, and two "Dads"—perfectly, happily together in the dark.

&

The Port Huron hideout was silent, the Michigan night pressing against the windows in a sheet of 18°F ice. It was Sunday night, January 18, 2026, and the weight of their latest defeat at the Blue Water Bridge had finally broken through Riva’s theatrical armor.

Riva sat on the edge of the bed, his purple shark onesie unzipped to the waist. He had discarded his monocle, and without the glass barrier, his eyes looked raw and tired. For the first time since they had arrived in 2026, he wasn't calculating. He was simply trembling.

“Statistically,” Riva started, his voice cracking into a jagged whisper, “we are nothing but shadows in a world that demands light. Eventually, Gura... the light is going to find the corners we’re hiding in. And it’s going to erase us.”

A single, crystalline tear escaped, tracing a shimmering path down his violet cheek. He didn't wipe it away; he didn't have the strength to maintain the mask anymore.

Gura didn't say a word. The massive man knelt on the floor between Riva’s knees, his grey shark fleece soft against Riva’s legs. He reached up, his massive, calloused hands framing Riva’s face with a tenderness that defied his predatory nature. With the pad of his thumb, Gura gently brushed the tear away.

“Let ‘em try to erase us, purple,” Gura rumbled, his voice a low, grounding frequency that seemed to steady the very air. “They’d have to get through me first. And I’m a lot of mountain to move.”

Riva looked down, another tear falling, then another. He leaned forward, burying his face in Gura’s sturdy, fleece-covered shoulder. The "theatrical strategist" finally broke, his breath hitching into a sob that he had been holding back since the Shadow Realm fell.

Gura pulled him closer, his arms wrapping around Riva in a crushing, protective cage of warmth. He let Riva weep, his own golden eyes wet with a rare, silent grief. In the dark of 2026, they weren't generals or monsters; they were just two souls terrified of losing the only home they had ever known—each other.

Regina stood at the doorway, her red shark hood pulled low. She didn't shout or demand attention. Instead, she walked over and sat on the floor beside Gura, leaning her head against his arm. Loot the bat fluttered down, landing softly on Riva’s shaking shoulder, letting out a tiny, mourning skree as he nuzzled into Riva’s neck.

“We’re a squad,” Regina whispered, her own voice thick with emotion. “Sharks don’t cry alone.”

As the 2026 January wind howled outside, the Shark Squad sat in the dark—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. They were unified by the salt of their tears and the heat of a bond that no amount of glitter or light could ever truly dissolve.

&

The Port Huron hideout was a fortress against the Michigan winter on this Sunday night, January 18, 2026. Outside, the temperature had bottomed out at a brutal 15°F, and the wind off the St. Clair River rattled the window frames with a persistent, icy claw.

Inside, the aftermath of a narrow escape from the Glitter Force had left the atmosphere heavy. Riva was pacing the rug in his purple shark onesie, his fingers twisting the silver chain of his monocle. His breathing was sharp, his mind clearly trapped in a 2026-level loop of "what-ifs" and failed calculations.

"I should have seen the flank coming," Riva muttered, his voice trembling. "The statistical probability of them using the bridge as a bottleneck was—"

Gura didn't let him finish. He stood up from the sofa, a massive mountain of grey fleece, and simply stepped into Riva's path. He didn't use words; he knew Riva's head was a beehive that logic couldn't quiet. Gura reached out and placed his heavy, warm hands on Riva’s shoulders, applying a steady, grounding pressure.

"Stop," Gura rumbled, his voice a low frequency that seemed to vibrate the very air. "You're in the hideout, purple. You're safe. We’re all here."

Riva leaned his forehead against Gura’s chest, the tension finally snapping. He let out a long, shuddering exhale, his hands clutching the soft grey fleece of Gura’s sleeves.

Regina walked over, her red shark hood pulled low. She didn't make a demand or a joke. Instead, she sat on the floor at their feet and leaned her head against Gura’s knee, reaching up to take Riva’s hand in hers. "It’s okay," she whispered, her voice uncharacteristically soft for a princess. "They didn't get us. They’ll never get the Squad."

Loot the bat, sensing the shift, dived from the rafters. He landed softly on the "fin" of Riva’s hood, his wings wrapping around Riva’s temple in a tiny, fuzzy embrace. He let out a rhythmic, soothing skree that acted like a metronome for Riva’s racing heart.

"See?" Gura whispered, pulling Riva into a crushing, protective hug. "Even the thief knows the war is over for tonight."

Gura guided them all toward the oversized sofa, burying the entire Shark Squad under a mountain of weighted velvet blankets. Riva was tucked into Gura’s side, Regina was curled against Gura’s other arm, and Loot was nestled in the "mouth" of Gura’s hood.

In the silence of the 2026 Michigan night, the only sound was the radiator's hiss and the synchronized breathing of four souls who had found their own version of peace. Riva finally closed his eyes, the cold world outside forgotten in the heat of the only home he had ever truly known.

&

The Port Huron hideout was a sea of blue-tinted shadows and flickering light on this Sunday night, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan wind whipped off the St. Clair River at a bone-chilling 15°F, but the interior was a tropical sanctuary of fleece and high-calorie snacks.

The third movie of their "Shark-Nado" marathon was playing on the projector, but the room had gone quiet. The sharp, theatrical commentary that Riva usually provided had faded into a slow, rhythmic silence.

Riva was the first to succumb. He was tucked into Gura’s side, his purple shark onesie blending into the heavy velvet blankets. His monocle had slipped from his eye and dangled by its silver chain against his chest. His head had come to rest on Gura’s sturdy shoulder, his violet hair fanning out like silk. In the blue light of the 2026 film, the "theatrical strategist" looked remarkably soft, his breathing finally deep and even.

Gura was a mountain of radiant heat. He was sprawled across the sofa in his grey shark fleece, one massive arm draped protectively over Riva and the other anchoring Regina. Gura’s head was tilted back against the cushions, his golden eyes closed and his mouth slightly open. A low, rumbling snore—a sound more felt than heard—vibrated through the couch, acting as a grounding bass note to the Michigan winter.

Regina was curled into a red-fleece ball in the "valley" of Gura’s side. She had fought the sleep longer than anyone, determined to see the shark eat the final skyscraper, but the 2026 sugar crash from the Pancake Festival had won. She was fast asleep, her head resting on Gura’s bicep, her small hand still clutching a handful of un-eaten popcorn.

Loot the bat was the final piece of the huddle. He had abandoned the rafters long ago, seeking the warmth of the Squad. He was tucked into the "mouth" of Gura’s grey shark hood, only his tiny onyx nose and the tips of his ears visible. He let out a rhythmic, nearly silent skree in his sleep, his tiny wings wrapped tight around his fuzzy body.

On the screen, a digital shark executed a final, impossible mid-air flip, but no one was there to calculate the physics. In the heart of the 2026 winter, the Shark Squad was at peace. They weren't villains, generals, or predators; they were just a family, safe in the dark, unified by the flickering blue light and the warmth of a bond that no shadow could break.

As the 2026 credits rolled in silence, the four of them breathed in unison—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—perfectly, happily, and shark-fully asleep.

&

The Port Huron hideout was illuminated by the sterile, blue-white glow of the refrigerator on this Sunday night, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan temperature had bottomed out at 16°F, but inside, the Shark Squad was engaged in a "sensory evaluation" of a stolen crate of 2026 limited-edition "Arctic Lime" sparkling water.

"Statistically, the carbonation levels in this beverage are aggressive enough to qualify as a chemical propellant," Riva remarked, holding a crystal glass up to his monocle. He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, watching the tiny bubbles dance with a look of high-brow suspicion. "It is an aesthetic triumph, yet a textural nightmare."

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, didn't bother with a glass. He cracked open a can, the psshht echoing off the kitchen tiles like a miniature steam vent. He took a massive swig, and his golden eyes immediately bulged.

"It’s... it’s biting back!" Gura roared, a series of tiny, rapid-fire burps escaping his throat. He looked at the can with newfound respect. "Riva, it’s like drinking a thousand tiny, angry needles. I think I like it. It’s got... spirit."

Regina was already halfway through her own can, her red shark hood pulled up. "It’s not needles, Gura, it’s sparkles! I’m drinking the stars!" She let out a sharp, carbonated giggle and began to shake a can vigorously. "Loot, execute the 'Explosive Refreshment' protocol!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he dived from the rafters just as Regina popped the tab. A fountain of lime-scented spray erupted, coating the bat in a mist of fine, fizzy droplets.

Loot landed on the counter, looking like a very damp, very confused grey smudge. He licked a bubble off his nose and his entire body gave a sudden, involuntary twitch. He shook himself out, his wings flapping in a frantic, rhythmic beat, before letting out a high-pitched, bubbly chirp of approval.

"Now the bat is carbonated," Riva sighed, though he surreptitiously took a sip from

his glass. The bubbles prickled against his tongue, sharp and cold. "Hmm. The mouth-feel is... surprisingly formidable. It provides a certain 'calculated' sting."

Gura leaned over, his grey fleece rubbing against Riva’s purple sleeves, and gave him a quick, lime-scented kiss on the cheek. "See? 2026 isn't all bad, purple. Even the water is a predator."

Riva huffed, his face flushing a deep violet. "You are a disaster, Gura. A fizzy, gluttonous disaster."

Regina was busy trying to see if she could make a "bubble-Distain" by pouring the water into a bowl of dish soap. "Shark Squad Fizz-Night! No Glitter Force allowed until the crate is empty!"

As the midnight hour of January 19, 2026, approached, the Shark Squad sat in a heap of fleece and aluminum—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—perfectly, bubbly, and shark-fully full.

&

In the Shadow Realm palace, the air was thick with the scent of boiled potatoes and theatrical ambition. It was Sunday, January 18, 2026, but Regina had decided the Shark Squad would not wait for the human calendar. After a successful raid on a 2026 party supply warehouse in Port Huron, she had decreed an immediate “Emerald Sovereignty Day.”

"Statistically, the saturation of this specific shade of green is offensive to the optical nerves," Riva remarked, adjusting his custom-tailored 2026 shark onesie. He had traded his usual violet for a deep, shimmering forest green, accented by a silk cravat patterned with tiny, four-leaf shark fins. "However, the gold-to-glitter ratio of the decorations is... acceptable."

Gura lumbered into the throne room, looking like a massive mossy mountain in his oversized green shark fleece. He was carrying a giant wooden bucket filled with "Shamrock Sliders"—miniature burgers dyed a vibrant, unearthly green. "I don't care about the luck, Riva," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration. "I care about the 'All-You-Can-Eat' policy of this holiday. I’m a Great Green Shark!"

Regina sat on her throne, draped in a red-and-green shark hoodie, wearing a crown made of gold-wrapped chocolate coins. "Loot, execute the 'Pot of Gold' protocol! Find the humans’ stash of mint-chocolate shakes!"

Loot the bat was the most festive of all. He was wearing his custom 2026 "Leper-Bat" outfit—a tiny green vest over his shark hoodie, complete with a miniature velvet top hat. He let out a sharp, rhythmic skree and dived into a pile of green tinsel, emerging looking like a fuzzy, winged shamrock. He performed a victory lap before landing on Gura’s head to steal a piece of green cheese.

"Gura, you have emerald-tinted mustard on your lapel," Riva sighed, though his eyes softened as he watched the brute. He walked over and, with a practiced hand, wiped the smudge away with a silk handkerchief. "Maintain some dignity. We are villains, not garden gnomes."

"I'm a lucky charm, Riva," Gura grinned, showing his sharp teeth. He reached out, his massive, fleece-covered hand swallowing Riva’s. He pulled the smaller man into a warm, grounding embrace. "And I'm the luckiest predator in the sea 'cause I found you."

Riva’s face flushed a deep shade of violet-green. "Don't be sentimental, you brute. It’s statistically inefficient."

The four of them huddled together on the velvet dais—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. Loot dived into a bowl of "Green-Apple" gummies, emerging with a sticky mustache that made Regina shriek with laughter. Gura leaned his heavy head on Riva’s shoulder, the 2026 January wind howling harmlessly outside the black stone walls.

"Happy St. Patrick's Day, or whatever," Gura grunted.

"Indeed," Riva whispered, closing his eyes as he squeezed Gura's hand. "To the Shark Squad. The luckiest shadows in 2026."

&

The Port Huron boardwalk was a neon-drenched blur of whirling lights and freezing lake spray on the night of Sunday, January 18, 2026. The "Big Freeze" Winter Carnival was in full swing, and the Shark Squad was currently moving through the midway with the subtle grace of a tidal wave.

"Statistically, the probability of winning that three-foot-tall plush crustacean is less than two percent," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple-tinted sunglasses against the glare of the 'Whack-A-Mole' station. He was draped in his signature purple shark onesie, though he had added a high-fashion violet scarf to combat the 19°F Michigan wind. "It is a psychological trap designed to exploit human desperation, Gura."

"It's not a trap, it's a target!" Gura roared. He looked like a massive grey-fleece mountain, clutching a tray of deep-fried Twinkies from a nearby stand. He handed one to Riva, who took it with the theatrical caution of someone handling a live grenade. "Eat it, purple. It’ll give you the energy to help me cheat at the 'Ring Toss' so I can get Regina that giant stuffed shark."

Regina was already halfway up the 'Arctic Slide,' her red shark hood flapping in the gale. "I’m the Queen of the Midway!" she commanded, her laughter cutting through the 2026 pop music blaring from the speakers. "Loot, execute the aerial

reconnaissance! Find the stand with the 'Shark-Sized' hot chocolate!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, resonant skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 "Winter-Bat" parka over his tiny shark hoodie. He dived from the rafters of the carousel, his wings catching the gold and violet lights as he did a series of acrobatic loops above the crowd. He landed on Gura’s head with a tiny, marshmallow-scented chirp of triumph.

The squad moved toward the Ferris wheel as the 11:30 PM hour approached. They claimed a gondola to themselves, the four of them squeezed into the small, swaying space. As they rose above the St. Clair River, the lights of the Blue Water Bridge stretched out beside them like a shimmering skeleton of diamonds.

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the heat from the fried snacks and the big man’s massive frame finally making him relax. "I suppose... the sensory input is acceptable," Riva murmured.

Gura wrapped a massive, fleece-covered arm around Riva and Regina, pulling them into a crushing, warm embrace. "It’s better than the Shadow Realm, isn't it?" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency.

"Statistically? Yes," Riva whispered, his hand finding Gura’s in the dark.

As the Ferris wheel reached its apex, a final 2026 winter firework blossomed over the water—a massive flower of gold and violet. Loot chirped from the railing, his tiny wings reflecting the light.

In the heart of Port Huron, the Shark Squad sat in silence—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the cold air and the warmth of a family that conquered carnivals together.

&

The Port Huron hideout was a sanctuary of comfort on this Sunday night, January 18, 2026. Outside, the Michigan temperature had bottomed out at 16°F, and the wind off Lake Huron was howling against the brickwork, but inside, the Shark Squad was engaged in a "high-viscosity nutritional mission."

"Statistically, the cocoa-to-dairy ratio in this 'Double-Fudge' variant is the only thing capable of stabilizing our 2026 winter morale," Riva remarked. He was meticulously stirring a crystal pitcher with a long silver spoon, wearing his purple shark onesie. He held a glass up to the fireplace, watching the rich, brown liquid swirl. "It is an aesthetic triumph of the culinary arts."

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, didn't bother with a glass. He had a two-quart plastic jug of "Shark-Chocolate" milk tipped directly toward his mouth. He took a massive swig, his golden eyes widening as a thick, chocolate

mustache immediately bloomed across his upper lip.

"It’s like drinking a liquid velvet steak, Riva!" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that made the floorboards shake. He let out a satisfied, cocoa-scented sigh. "I could conquer three kingdoms and at least one Glitter Force on just a gallon of this stuff."

Regina was sitting on the rug, her red shark hood pulled up, holding a giant mug filled with chocolate milk and a mountain of "Arctic" marshmallows. "I’m the Queen of the Cocoa! Loot, execute the 'Straw-Retrieval' protocol! I want the one that loops around like a rollercoaster!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he dived from the rafters, landing on the edge of Regina’s mug. He leaned down, his tiny pink tongue flicking at a stray bubble of chocolate foam. He let out a rhythmic, bubbly chirp of approval, his tiny wings flapping in a frantic, sugar-fueled beat.

"Careful, little thief," Gura chuckled, reaching out to gently wipe a drop of chocolate from Loot's wing. He looked over at Riva, his eyes softening in the firelight. "You’re too refined, purple. You gotta drink it from the jug at least once. It tastes like victory."

Riva huffed, though he surreptitiously took a deep, un-aristocratic gulp from his glass. "The mouth-feel is... formidable. I find the sugar-induced dopamine spike to be acceptable." He reached over and used a silk napkin to wipe the chocolate mustache from Gura’s face. "And try to breathe, you brute. You look like a very messy predator."

Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the light. He leaned in and gave Riva a quick, chocolate-tasting kiss on the temple. "Now we’re both messy sharks."

As the clock ticked toward midnight on this January 18, 2026, the Shark Squad sat in a heap of fleece and cocoa—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. Unified by the scent of chocolate and the warmth of the Michigan hideout, they were perfectly, happily, and shark-fully full.

&

The Port Huron hideout was hushed on the night of Sunday, January 18, 2026, as the Michigan frost formed intricate crystalline ferns against the glass. Inside, the "Shark Squad" was winding down from their weekend of carnival raids with a "statistically balanced" midnight snack.

"I have calculated that a crisp Honeycrisp apple provides the optimal crunch-to-fructose ratio for a late-night recovery," Riva remarked, his voice a low, melodic lilt. He sat on the velvet sofa in his purple shark onesie, meticulously using a silver

paring knife to carve an apple into perfect, paper-thin crescents.

Gura, looking like a hulking mountain of grey fleece, watched the knife with the intensity of a predator. "Just give me the slices, purple. My stomach doesn't care about 'ratios,' it cares about volume." Gura reached out, his massive hand surprisingly steady as he took a slice from Riva’s plate. He crunched into it, the sound echoing in the quiet room. "It’s good. Tastes like... 2026 victory."

Regina was sprawled across the rug in her red shark onesie, holding a small bowl of caramel dip she had "liberated" from the Winter Festival. "I want mine in the shape of crowns! Loot, execute the 'Peel Retrieval' mission!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom-tailored 2026 shark hoodie, his tiny wings tucked tight as he perched on the arm of the sofa. He dived toward the coffee table, snatching a long, curly strand of red apple peel with his feet. He performed a victory lap around the radiator before landing on Riva’s shoulder to nibble his prize in peace.

"Careful, little thief," Riva sighed, though he surreptitiously offered Loot a tiny, core-adjacent piece. He looked over at Gura, who was currently trying to fit three apple slices into his mouth at once. "Gura, maintain some dignity. You are a Mercenare general, not a wood-chipper."

Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the firelight. He leaned over, his grey fleece rubbing against Riva’s purple sleeves, and gave him a quick, apple-scented kiss on the cheek. "I’m a well-fed general, Riva. That’s a tactical advantage."

Riva’s face flushed a deep violet. "You are an impossible creature."

As the clock ticked toward midnight on this January 18, 2026, the Shark Squad settled into a comfortable silence. Regina was busy dipping her "crown" slices into the caramel, Loot was grooming his sticky wings, and Gura had leaned his heavy head on Riva’s shoulder.

"Riva?" Gura muffled.

"Yes, Gura?"

"We should buy a whole orchard in the spring."

Riva smiled, closing his eyes as he leaned into Gura’s warmth. "Statistically, Gura, that is a logistical nightmare. But... I find the idea acceptable."

In the heart of the Michigan winter, the Shark Squad sat together—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the simple, crisp sweetness of a shared snack.

&

The Port Huron hideout was filled with a sharp, bright citrus scent on the afternoon of Monday, January 19, 2026. Outside, the Michigan sky was a flat, industrial gray, but inside, the Shark Squad was engaged in a "tactical Vitamin C offensive" to ward off the lingering chill of the 15°F morning.

"Statistically, the essential oils in these rinds are potent enough to act as a mild sensory deterrent to our enemies," Riva remarked. He was sitting elegantly on the velvet sofa in his purple shark onesie, meticulously peeling a Clementine. He removed every single string of white pith with the precision of a surgeon. "And the color is a refreshing departure from the perpetual gloom of the Shadow Realm."

Gura, a massive mountain of grey fleece, was currently staring at a large Navel orange as if it had insulted his honor. He didn't use his fingers; with a low, gravelly rumble, he simply bit the orange in half—peel and all. "It's got a kick, Riva! Like a tiny, juicy explosion in my mouth!" Gura roared, his golden eyes widening as the juice sprayed his grey shark-hood.

Regina was sprawled on the rug in her red shark onesie, surrounded by a pile of peels she had shaped into a miniature jagged mountain range. "I’m the Queen of the Grove! Loot, execute the 'Segment Sabotage' protocol! Steal Gura’s extra slices!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom-tailored 2026 shark hoodie, his tiny wings flapping in a frantic, sugar-fueled rhythm. He dived from the rafters, snatching a loose segment from Gura’s plate with his feet. He did a victory loop around the radiator, the scent of orange blossoms trailing behind him like a 2026 perfume.

"Gura, you have a literal fountain of citrus on your chin," Riva sighed, though he reached out and used a silk handkerchief to wipe the juice away. He then held out a perfectly cleaned, pith-free segment to Gura. "Try eating it like a civilized predator for once."

Gura leaned in, taking the slice from Riva’s fingers, his golden eyes softening. He leaned over and gave Riva a quick, orange-scented kiss on the temple. "Tastes better when you do the work, purple."

Riva’s face flushed a deep violet. "You are an impossible creature, Gura. A sticky, gluttonous disaster."

Regina giggled, tossing a peel at them. "Shark Squad Orange-Fest! No Glitter Force allowed until our hands are permanently sticky!"

As the Monday afternoon light faded over the Blue Water Bridge, the Shark Squad sat in a heap of fleece and rinds—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. In the heart of the 2026 Michigan winter, they were perfectly, zestfully at home.

&

The Port Huron hideout was a sanctuary of deep crimson and velvet shadows on this Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026. Outside, the Michigan wind whipped off the St. Clair River at a biting 22°F, but inside, the air was heavy with the thick, intoxicating scent of five dozen "Black Baccara" roses that Gura had "liberated" from a high-end florist near the Blue Water Bridge.

"Statistically, the thorns on these hybrids are insufficient to penetrate Mercenare hide, yet the aesthetic impact is... formidable," Riva remarked. He was sitting at the mahogany table in his purple shark onesie, meticulously trimming the stems with a pair of silver shears. He adjusted his monocle, placing a single, perfect bud into a crystal vase. "It provides a much-needed touch of aristocratic gloom to this 2026 winter."

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, was currently lying on the rug, surrounded by a sea of discarded petals. He was trying to weave a "Crown of Thorns and Glory" for Riva, his massive, calloused fingers looking remarkably steady as they tangled with the green stems. "They reminded me of you, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency. "Sharp, fancy, and they smell better than everything else in this town."

Regina was in the center of the room, her red shark hood pulled up as she used her dark energy to make a dozen roses dance in a rhythmic, mid-air vortex. "I’m the Queen of the Briar! Loot, execute the 'Petal-Rain' protocol! Cover the strategist in red!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he dived into the vortex, his wings buffeting the flowers until a storm of crimson petals began to drift down over Riva’s head. Loot landed on Riva’s shoulder, a single red petal stuck to his tiny onyx nose, looking like a fuzzy brown gargoyle in a garden of blood.

"Loot, stop your horticultural sabotage," Riva sighed, though he reached up and gently plucked the petal from the bat's face. He looked over at Gura, who was now holding up the finished crown.

Gura stood up, walked over, and placed the crown of roses onto Riva’s head, right over the purple hood. "There. The King of the Sharks," Gura grinned, his golden eyes reflecting the hearth-fire. He leaned down, his breath warm against Riva's ear. "Happy Monday, Riva."

Riva’s face flushed a deep violet. He reached out, his hand finding Gura’s massive palm, their fingers interlocking amidst the scent of nectar and winter. "You are an impossible creature, Gura. A sentimental, thorn-covered brute."

"Yeah," Gura grunted, pulling Riva into a crushing, rose-scented hug. "But I'm your

brute."

As the afternoon light faded into the deep indigo of the 2026 Michigan winter, the Shark Squad sat together—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the scent of roses and the warmth of a family that bloomed in the dark.

&

The gray waters of Lake Huron churned under a 2026 winter gale, the temperature hovering at a biting 24°F on this Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026. On the frozen shoreline of Port Huron, the Shark Squad stood near the Blue Water Bridge, engaged in what Riva called "inter-species diplomatic resonance."

"Statistically, the salt-to-freshwater transition should have rendered these predators sluggish," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple-tinted shades. He stood at the edge of the pier in his signature purple shark onesie, holding his silver-topped cane like a conductor’s baton. "And yet, my calculations indicate a massive school of Great Whites is currently loitering near the international border."

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, stepped to the very edge of the icy piling. He closed his golden eyes and let out a low, gravelly hum—a rhythmic, sub-bass vibration that made the river water ripple. "They aren't lost, Riva. They’re waiting for the call." Gura’s voice dropped to a private frequency, a true Shark Whisperer at work.

Suddenly, a massive triangular fin sliced through the slushy ice of the St. Clair River, followed by another. The sharks of 2026 didn't attack; they circled the pier in a perfect, synchronized orbit, their cold eyes fixed on Gura.

"Look at them! They’re like our own personal navy!" Regina cheered, her red shark hood dusted with snow. She hopped onto the railing, waving her scepter. "Loot, execute the 'Apex Commander' protocol! Show them who owns the sky!"

Loot the bat let out a sonic, rhythmic skree. He dived from Gura’s shoulder, his custom 2026 shark hoodie flapping in the wind. He skimmed the surface of the water, the Great Whites breaching the surface in a spectacular display of power as they followed the tiny bat’s flight path. Loot was the bridge between the sea and the sky, a fuzzy brown general of the deep.

"Observe the coordination," Riva murmured, his theatrical composure melting into genuine awe. He reached out and placed a hand on Gura’s sturdy, fleece-covered shoulder. "You truly are their king, you brute."

Gura didn't look away from the water. He reached back, his massive hand swallowing Riva’s, their fingers locking together in the 2026 winter air. "Not their king, Riva. Just their brother. And they know who we are. They know the Squad is together."

Gura let out one final, resonant hum, and the sharks executed a simultaneous tail-flip, sending a massive spray of icy water into the air before diving back into the depths.

"Success," Riva whispered, wiping a drop of Lake Huron from his monocle. "The 2026 aquatic alliance is solidified."

Regina skipped back toward their heated hideout. "Great! Now tell your brothers to go find us some of those giant king crabs for dinner!"

As the January sun dipped toward the horizon, the Shark Squad waddled back into the warmth—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the rhythm of the sea and the whisper of a bond that transcended the surface.

&

In the velvet-draped sanctuary of the Port Huron hideout, the air was currently a "statistical disaster" of competing aromas. It was Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026, and Regina had decided that the Shark Squad’s scent profile was far too "base-level predator" and required a high-fashion 2026 upgrade.

"If we are to move through the human world undetected, we must smell like their most expensive botanical illusions!" Regina declared, slamming a crystal tray of vintage atomizers onto the vanity. She was wearing her red shark onesie, her blonde hair tied back with a silk ribbon. "Loot, execute the 'Scent-Test' protocol! Find the one that smells like a victory parade!"

Loot the bat was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he dived into the tray, his tiny onyx nose twitching. He hovered over a bottle of Oud & Obsidian, letting out a sharp, rhythmic skree of approval. He performed a victory lap, his wings dispersing a fine mist of sandalwood and spice across the room.

Riva sat on a gilded stool, his purple shark onesie unzipped at the neck. He meticulously picked up a bottle labeled Amethyst Shadows. "Statistically, the top note of bergamot should provide a necessary brightness to our dark energy," Riva remarked, dabbing the glass stopper behind his pointed ears with surgical precision. "It creates a 2026 aesthetic of 'sophisticated malice.'"

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, was currently staring at a bottle of Sea Salt & Musk. "Does it smell like the boardwalk?" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration. He took the bottle and, before Riva could stop him, gave himself a massive, five-second spray directly to the chest.

"Gura, no! You’ll be a walking olfactory hazard!" Riva cried, waving a silk handkerchief to clear the cloud.

"I smell like the ocean, purple!" Gura laughed, his deep voice shaking the

floorboards. He reached out and pulled Riva into a crushing, fleece-covered hug, rubbing his scent-soaked chest against Riva’s silk-lined hood. "Now you smell like a Great White, too."

Riva huffed, his face flushing a deep violet that matched his perfume. "You are an impossible creature, Gura. A perfumed, gluttonous disaster." However, he leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, surreptitiously inhaling the mix of salt, musk, and the faint, sweet scent of the donuts Gura had eaten for lunch.

Regina giggled, spraying a cloud of Rose & Ruby into the air. "Shark Squad Fragrance Mission! No Glitter Force allowed until we smell better than a flower shop!"

As the Monday afternoon sun dipped over the 2026 Michigan horizon, the Shark Squad sat in a hazy cloud of amber, salt, and violet—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by the scent of luxury and the warmth of a family that stayed fragrant together.

&

The Port Huron hideout was filled with the rhythmic crack-snap of shell-breaking on this Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026. Outside, the Michigan temperature sat at a bitter 24°F, but the Shark Squad was currently preoccupied with a massive galvanized bucket of King Crabs "liberated" from a high-end seafood distributor near the Blue Water Bridge.

"Statistically, the effort-to-protein ratio of these crustaceans is inefficient, yet the tactile satisfaction is... formidable," Riva remarked. He was meticulously using a silver pick to extract a perfect, unbroken ribbon of leg meat, wearing his purple shark onesie with a silk napkin tucked into the collar. He dipped the meat into a bowl of clarified butter infused with garlic, his monocle glinting in the 2026 winter sun.

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, didn't bother with silver tools. He was a force of nature, using his own sharp teeth to crunch through the spiked carapaces with terrifying ease. "It’s like a puzzle you get to eat, Riva!" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that made the butter bowls rattle. He handed a massive, steaming piece of claw meat to Riva. "Here. This one’s the prize. Tastes like the deep ocean."

Regina was sitting on the floor in her red shark onesie, surrounded by a fortress of discarded shells. "I’m the Queen of the Crabs! Loot, execute the 'Butter-Drip' protocol! Don't let a single drop hit the rug!"

Loot the bat was the most agile of all. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, his tiny wings flapping in a frantic, rhythmic beat as he hovered over the table. He dived toward a rogue drop of garlic butter, catching it mid-air with his

tongue before letting out a sharp, satisfied skree. He landed on Gura’s shoulder, looking like a tiny, winged gourmet.

"Gura, you have a literal shard of exoskeleton on your eyebrow," Riva sighed, though his eyes softened as he watched the brute. He reached out and used a damp silk cloth to wipe a smudge of butter from Gura’s cheek. "Maintain some dignity. We are the Shark Squad, not a demolition crew."

"I'm a hungry shark, purple," Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting. He leaned over, his grey fleece rubbing against Riva’s purple sleeves, and gave him a quick, salt-scented kiss on the temple. "And this is the best 2026 mission yet."

Regina giggled, cracking a leg with a loud thump. "Shark Squad Feast! No Glitter Force allowed until the bucket is empty!"

As the 1:28 PM light of Monday, January 19, 2026, faded over the frozen St. Clair River, the Shark Squad sat in a comfortable, savory heap—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. In the heart of the Michigan winter, they were perfectly, crustacean-ly at home.

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The January wind howled at 22°F outside the Port Huron hideout on this Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026. Inside, the atmosphere was thick with the scent of lavender oil and the low, rhythmic hum of the radiator.

Riva sat on the edge of the velvet bed, his purple shark onesie unzipped to the waist to reveal the base of his translucent, violet-tinged bat wings. The wings were twitching with a sharp, "statistically unbearable" ache—a result of the high-altitude reconnaissance he’d performed over the Blue Water Bridge earlier that morning.

"The tension in the primary membranes is reaching a critical threshold, Gura," Riva whispered, his head bowed, his hands clutching his knees.

Gura stepped out of the shadows, a mountain of grounding heat in his grey shark fleece. He sat on the bed behind Riva, his massive presence immediately stilling the room. He didn't use words; he simply reached out, his large, calloused hands coming to rest at the very top of Riva’s wings, right where the delicate muscle joined the bone behind his ears.

"Relax, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency that Riva could feel in his own chest. "I’ve got you."

Gura’s thumbs began to move in slow, deliberate circles. He was incredibly mindful of his strength, applying a firm yet tender pressure to the knots in Riva's wing-joints. He worked his way down the "fingers" of the wings, his palms generating a heat that melted the 2026 winter chill right out of Riva’s skin.

"Oh," Riva exhaled, a soft, involuntary moan escaping his throat. His eyes fluttered shut, and his head lulled back against Gura’s sturdy shoulder. "Right there, you brute. Don't stop."

Regina sat on the rug nearby, her red shark hood pulled up. She wasn't making demands for once; instead, she was focused on a smaller task. She held Loot the bat in her lap, gently stroking his tiny, furry wing-joints with a velvet cloth.

"Loot has wing-cramps too," Regina noted softly. "He was flying against the wind to keep up with Riva. He’s a brave little shark."

Loot let out a rhythmic, contented skree, his tiny onyx eyes closing as Regina massaged the base of his ears. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, his tiny wings draped over Regina’s hands like a piece of silk.

Gura shifted his grip, his fingers tracing the sensitive purple membrane of Riva's wings one last time before pulling the smaller man back into a crushing, protective hug. He leaned down, pressing a firm, salt-scented kiss to the spot he had just massaged behind Riva’s ear.

"Better?" Gura whispered.

"Statistically... yes," Riva murmured, his hands finding Gura’s massive forearms. "The resonance has stabilized."

As the 1:35 PM light of this January Monday faded into the grey of a Michigan afternoon, the Shark Squad remained in their huddle—a strategist, a brute, a princess, and a bat—unified by the quiet, tactile love that kept them whole in a world of shadows.

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The Port Huron hideout was a chaotic sea of purple, grey, and red fleece. It was Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026, and the 24°F Michigan wind was currently being ignored in favor of a much more serious competition: the "Shark Squad High-Velocity Tickle Ambush."

"Statistically, Regina, your reach is insufficient to breach my defenses!" Riva declared, perched elegantly atop a mountain of velvet pillows. He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, holding a silk fan as if it were a tactical shield. "I am the master of composure. I do not 'giggle.'"

"Oh, really?" Regina smirked, her red shark hood pulled low over her eyes. She signaled to the hulking grey mountain sitting behind Riva. "Now, Gura! Target the ribs!"

Gura didn't need a second order. With a low, rumbling chuckle that made the floorboards shake, he reached out with his massive, fleece-covered hands. "Sorry,

purple. Orders from the Princess."

Gura’s fingers—surprisingly nimble for a brute—found the sensitive seam of Riva’s onesie. The result was instantaneous. The "theatrical strategist" let out a high-pitched, melodic shriek that was definitely a giggle, his legs kicking out in a flurry of purple polyester.

"Gura! You—hah!—you treacherous beast!" Riva gasped, squirming as Gura pulled him back into a crushing, playful hug. "Cease this... this statistical anomaly at once!"

"Can't hear you over the laughing, Riva!" Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting in the 2026 winter sun. He leaned in, nuzzling his nose against Riva’s ear until the smaller man was breathless with laughter.

Loot the bat, sensing the shift in energy, dived from the rafters. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he executed a perfect mid-air flip before landing squarely on Gura’s head. He began to "groom" Gura’s grey shark fin with frantic, rhythmic nibbles, letting out a sharp, joyful skree.

"See? Even Loot thinks you need to lighten up!" Regina cheered, jumping into the center of the pile and poking Gura’s stomach. "Shark pile! Everyone into the shark pile!"

The four of them collapsed into a tangled heap of limbs and fleece. Riva, finally conceding defeat, leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, his chest still heaving with the remnants of his laughter.

"I suppose... a momentary lapse in dignity is acceptable," Riva whispered, surreptitiously reaching out to tickle Gura’s chin.

"Gotcha back," Gura rumbled, squeezing them all tight.

As the 4:00 PM light of Monday, January 19, 2026, faded over the frozen St. Clair River, the Shark Squad remained in their huddle—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—perfectly, playfully at home in the dark.

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The Port Huron hideout was hushed, the only sound the rhythmic ticking of a vintage clock and the distant hum of the Blue Water Bridge. Outside, the Michigan winter of Monday, January 19, 2026, held steady at a freezing 24°F, but the interior was a sanctuary of soft textures and low voices.

Riva sat by the frosted window in his purple shark onesie, his hands occupied with the delicate task of repairing a tear in Loot’s favorite velvet roost. His movements were slow and precise, his theatrical sharp edges smoothed over by the quiet of the afternoon.

Gura approached from the kitchen, his heavy boots making no sound on the thick rugs. He didn't speak; he simply sat on the floor beside Riva’s chair, a massive, grounding presence in his grey shark fleece. With a gentleness that always surprised Riva, Gura reached up and took Riva’s left hand, turning it over to press a slow, lingering kiss to the center of his palm.

"You've been sewing for an hour, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, private frequency. "Your fingers are starting to shake. Give it a rest."

Riva sighed, leaning his head back against the chair. "Statistically, Gura, if I do not finish this, Loot will attempt to sleep on my top hat, which is a logistical catastrophe I cannot permit." But he let the needle rest, his fingers tangling with Gura’s large, calloused ones.

Regina was curled up on the rug at Gura’s other side, her red shark hood pulled up. She wasn't making demands or shouting orders. Instead, she was meticulously brushing the fur of a sleeping Loot, using a soft-bristled brush Riva had found for her. Her touch was incredibly light, her expression one of rare, uncalculated peace.

"He's dreaming," Regina whispered, pointing to the way Loot’s tiny wings gave a rhythmic, involuntary twitch. "He thinks he’s catching the biggest mango in 2026."

Loot let out a tiny, contented skree in his sleep, nuzzling deeper into the soft red fleece of Regina's lap. He looked like a small, fuzzy heart, completely safe within the circle of the Squad.

Gura shifted, pulling Riva down from the chair until they were all huddled together on the floor. He wrapped his massive arms around the princess and the strategist, pulling them into a slow, warm embrace that smelled of cedar and the cinnamon tea they’d shared earlier.

"We’re okay," Gura murmured, his chin resting atop Riva’s head. "No Glitter Force, no King. Just us."

Riva closed his eyes, the 2026 winter chill outside forgotten. He felt the steady, rhythmic beat of Gura’s heart against his shoulder and the soft rise and fall of Regina’s breathing. "I suppose," Riva whispered into the quiet, "that our survival is more than just a calculation. It is... a comfort."

As the 4:05 PM light of January 19, 2026, faded into the indigo of a Michigan evening, the Shark Squad remained still—a princess, two monsters, and a bat—unified by a gentleness that was their greatest, quietest victory.

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The sky over Port Huron was a bruised shade of violet on this Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026. A sudden Lake Huron squall had sent the temperature

plummeting to a bone-chilling 15°F, turning the slushy streets into a jagged landscape of black ice.

The Shark Squad was pinned down near the base of the Blue Water Bridge. A 2026-level blizzard had rolled in faster than Riva’s calculations could predict, and the Glitter Force was closing in, their glowing light cutting through the whiteout like searchlights.

"The thermal dissipation is critical!" Riva shouted over the roar of the wind, his purple shark onesie whipped by the gale. He held his silver-topped cane high, projecting a flickering violet barrier, but his hands were trembling from the sheer cold. "Statistically, we cannot maintain this position!"

Gura didn't look at the map or the math. The massive man stepped in front of Riva and Regina, his grey-fleece shark onesie expanding as he summoned every ounce of his Mercenare bulk. He became a literal wall of muscle and heat, his back to the freezing wind to create a sheltered pocket for the others.

"I’m the shield!" Gura roared, his golden eyes burning with a fierce, protective light. "Nothing touches the Squad while I’m standing!"

Regina huddled against Gura’s sturdy side, her red shark hood pulled tight. She wasn't acting like a bratty princess; she was focused. She raised her scepter, her dark energy weaving into Gura’s shadow to reinforce the "Shark Fortress."

"Stay behind him, Riva!" she commanded. "Loot, execute the 'Vanguard Overwatch'! Don't let them see the gap!"

Loot the bat dived from the shelter of Gura’s hood, his custom 2026 shark hoodie tattered by the wind. He let out a sonic, rhythmic skree that acted as a sonar, pinpointing the heroes' locations through the blinding snow. He circled Gura’s head like a tiny, fuzzy fighter pilot, his wings flapping in a frantic, heroic beat to stay airborne.

A blast of sparkling energy hit Gura’s shoulder, but he didn't flinch. He reached back with one massive hand, grabbing Riva’s arm and pulling him closer into the warmth of his chest.

"I’ve got you," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, grounding frequency that drowned out the storm. "I’ve always got you."

Riva leaned into the heat, his theatrical mask finally cracking. He pressed his palm against Gura’s broad back, channeling his own remaining energy into Gura’s strength. "Indeed," Riva whispered, his breath hitching. "Our survival is... the only priority."

As the 4:10 PM light of January 19, 2026, vanished into the whiteout, the Shark

Squad stood unified. They weren't fighting for a kingdom or a crown; they were fighting for the heat of the body next to them.

"SHARK SQUAD BREACH!" they roared together.

With a final, explosive burst of violet and grey energy, they shattered the line of the storm and vanished into the shadows of the bridge. Ten minutes later, they were safe in their heated hideout, huddling under a mountain of blankets. Gura sat with Riva and Regina tucked under his massive arms, while Loot nuzzled into Riva’s neck.

"A successful extraction," Riva murmured, his voice finally steady.

"Told you," Gura grunted, squeezing them tight. "Nobody messes with my sharks."

&

The Port Huron hideout was a fortress of warmth on this Monday evening, January 19, 2026. Outside, the Michigan wind howled at 18°F, but inside, the air was thick with the scent of cedarwood and the soft hiss of the radiator.

Riva sat on the velvet sofa, his purple shark onesie zipped to the chin. He was meticulously cleaning his monocle, but his hands—usually so steady—had a slight, lingering tremor from their narrow escape near the Blue Water Bridge. He looked at his silver-topped cane leaning against the wall, then at the man sitting on the floor at his feet.

"Statistically," Riva began, his voice a low, silken rasp, "the odds of us maintaining this sanctuary through the winter were low. The 2026 upgrades to the human defenses are... formidable."

Gura didn't look at the charts or the math. He reached up, his massive, calloused hand swallowing Riva’s knee. "Doesn't matter how high the odds are, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low, grounding frequency that seemed to steady Riva’s heart. "You’re in the house. The doors are locked. The heater’s on. You’re safe."

Regina was curled into a red-fleece ball on the other side of Gura, her head resting on his sturdy shoulder. She had her eyes closed, clutching a plush shark, her breathing finally deep and even. She wasn't a princess of shadows tonight; she was just a girl who knew she didn't have to look over her shoulder.

Loot the bat was the final piece of the 2026 safety-puzzle. He was tucked into the "mouth" of Gura’s grey shark hood, his tiny onyx nose twitching as he slept. He let out a rhythmic, nearly silent skree, his wings wrapped tight around his fuzzy body like a velvet shield.

Gura shifted, pulling Riva down from the sofa until they were all huddled together on the thick rug. He wrapped his massive arms around the strategist and the princess, a mountain of grey fleece that acted as a biological barrier against the

world.

"Nobody's getting in here, Riva," Gura whispered, his breath warm against Riva's temple. "I'm the biggest predator in Michigan. And I'm not letting anything happen to my squad."

Riva leaned his head against Gura’s shoulder, the polyester of their onesies rubbing together with a soft shush. He finally let his eyes close, the calculations and the 2026 projections fading into the heat of Gura’s side.

"I find this level of security to be... acceptable," Riva murmured, his fingers tangling in the grey fleece of Gura’s sleeve.

As the clock ticked toward 4:15 PM on January 19, 2026, the Shark Squad was still. In the heart of the Michigan winter, they were finally, perfectly, and shark-fully safe.

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The Port Huron hideout was illuminated by the sharp, theatrical glow of the vanity lights on this Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026. Outside, the Michigan wind whipped around the Blue Water Bridge at a biting 22°F, but inside, Regina had decided that the Shark Squad’s current aesthetic was "statistically lacking in glamour."

"If we are to be the most feared predators in 2026, we must have the lips of a siren!" Regina declared, slamming a tray of high-end human lipsticks onto the table. She was wearing her red shark onesie, her blonde hair tied back with a velvet ribbon. "Loot, execute the 'Pigment-Recon' protocol! Find the shade that screams 'Royal Destruction'!"

Loot the bat let out a sharp, supportive skree. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, and he dived into the tray, emerging with a sleek black tube of Shadow Crimson clutched in his teeth. He performed a victory lap before landing on Riva’s shoulder, dropping the "loot" into Riva's hand.

Riva sat on a velvet stool, looking deeply skeptical as he adjusted his monocle. He was dressed in his purple shark onesie, but he had allowed Regina to drape a silk salon cape over his shoulders. "Regina, I fail to see how 'Long-Wear Amethyst Gloss' increases our combat efficiency. Statistically, it merely creates a tacky residue on my tea cups."

"Silence, Riva! Your lips are a canvas for my genius!" Regina commanded, brandishing a lip brush like a scepter. She applied a sharp, precise coat of dark purple to Riva's lips, making them look like a bruised, beautiful shadow.

Gura was sitting on the floor, his massive frame squeezed into his grey shark fleece. He was currently staring at a tube of Steak-House Red as if it were a new species of

snack. "Does it smell like berries?" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration.

Before Riva could stop him, Gura swiped a broad streak of the red lipstick across his own mouth—and his cheek. "Look, purple! I'm a war-shark!"

"Gura, no! You look like you've been eating a box of crayons!" Riva sighed, though he couldn't hide the smirk as he looked at the brute. He reached out with a silk cloth and used his thumb to blend the red on Gura's cheek into a fierce, shark-tooth pattern. "There. If you must be a 'war-shark,' at least do it with some 2026-level style."

Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting against the bold red. He leaned over, his grey fleece rubbing against Riva's purple sleeves, and gave Riva a quick, waxy, cherry-scented kiss on the cheek. "Now we're both marked for the squad, Riva."

Riva's face flushed a deep violet that matched his new lip gloss. "You are an impossible creature, Gura. A smeared, gluttonous disaster."

Regina giggled, applying a final layer of glitter-topcoat to herself. "Shark Squad Makeup Mission! No Glitter Force allowed until our pouts are perfect!"

As the 4:25 PM light of Monday, January 19, 2026, faded over the frozen St. Clair River, the Shark Squad sat in a heap of fleece and shimmer—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. They were covered in Shadow Crimson and Midnight Amethyst, perfectly, beautifully ready to face the winter night.

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The Port Huron hideout was filled with a lush, tropical aroma that defied the Monday afternoon chill. It was January 19, 2026, and the outside temperature sat at a biting 21°F, but the Shark Squad had just returned from a "high-stakes tactical acquisition" at a local organic market.

"Statistically, the ripeness of a mango is a fleeting window of perfection," Riva remarked, adjusting his purple-tinted sunglasses. He sat at the mahogany table in his purple shark onesie, meticulously peeling a large, golden fruit with a silver paring knife. "If we do not consume these within the next three hundred seconds, the sugar profile will begin to degrade."

Gura, looking like a massive grey-fleece mountain, didn't bother with silver tools. He picked up a whole mango, the skin yielding easily to his sharp teeth. "It's like sunshine you can chew, Riva!" Gura rumbled, his voice a low, gravelly vibration that made the fruit bowls rattle. He handed a massive, dripping slice to Riva. "Here. This one's the sweetest. Tastes like the islands we're gonna conquer next."

Regina was sitting on the floor in her red shark onesie, surrounded by a fortress of mango skins. "I'm the Queen of the Tropics! Loot, execute the 'Juice-Retrieval'

protocol! Don't let a single drop hit the rug!"

Loot the bat was the most agile of all. He was wearing his custom 2026 shark hoodie, his tiny wings flapping in a frantic, rhythmic beat as he hovered over the table. He dived toward a rogue drop of mango nectar, catching it mid-air with his tongue before letting out a sharp, satisfied skree. He landed on Gura’s shoulder, looking like a tiny, winged connoisseur with a bright orange mustache.

"Gura, you have a literal fountain of pulp on your chin," Riva sighed, though his eyes softened as he watched the brute. He reached out and used a silk handkerchief to wipe the juice away from Gura’s mouth. "Maintain some dignity. We are the Shark Squad, not a juicing machine."

"I'm a hungry shark, purple," Gura grinned, his sharp teeth glinting. He leaned over, his grey fleece rubbing against Riva’s purple sleeves, and gave him a quick, mango-scented kiss on the temple. "And this is the best 2026 mission yet."

Regina giggled, tossing a pit into the bin. "Shark Squad Mango-Fest! No Glitter Force allowed until the fruit is gone!"

As the 4:27 PM light of Monday, January 19, 2026, faded over the frozen St. Clair River, the Shark Squad sat in a comfortable, sticky heap—a princess, two monsters, and a bat. In the heart of the Michigan winter, they were perfectly, tropically at home.

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The steam in the Port Huron hideout’s master washroom was thick enough to swallow the world outside, creating a private, humid sanctuary on this Monday afternoon, January 19, 2026. Outside, the Michigan wind rattled the glass at a biting 18°F, but the water cascading over the black marble was a steady, rhythmic heat.

Riva stood under the spray, his head bowed as the water slicked his violet hair back. Without his theatrical armor or his shark onesie, he looked strikingly lithe, his pale skin flushed a soft lilac from the warmth.

Gura stepped into the stall behind him, a massive, grounding presence that immediately cut the chill of the air. He didn't say a word; he simply wrapped his large, calloused arms around Riva’s waist, pulling him back against the solid heat of his chest. The contrast was a study in 2026-style devotion: Riva’s slender frame held firmly by Gura’s raw power.

Gura leaned down, his lips finding the sensitive curve where Riva’s neck met his shoulder. He began a slow, deliberate trail of kisses, his stubble grazing the skin with a soft, electric friction.

"You’re always so tense, purple," Gura rumbled, his voice a low vibration that Riva

felt in his own bones. He pressed a firm, lingering kiss to the base of Riva's ear, then another to the pulse point at his throat. "The calculations don't matter in here."

Riva let out a long, shuddering sigh, his eyes fluttering shut as he leaned back into Gura’s strength. The water drummed against them, a natural metronome for the rising heat. "Statistically," Riva whispered, his voice a mere silken rasp in the steam, "the probability of me... belonging anywhere else... is zero."

Gura turned him around in the spray, his hands cupping Riva’s face with a gentleness that still, in 2026, felt like a miracle. He looked into Riva’s violet eyes, his own golden gaze dark with a fierce, uncalculated loyalty.

The lovemaking that followed was slow and rhythmic, dictated by the heat and the steady pulse of the shower. Every touch was an exploration, every movement a silent vow. Gura was mindful of his strength, his hands anchoring Riva as they moved together in the hazy, blue-lit steam.

As the intensity peaked, Riva reached up, his wet fingers tangling in Gura’s hair. He pulled him close, his voice trembling with a sincerity he never allowed the world to see.

"Gura," Riva breathed, a soft, breathless moan escaping as he pressed his forehead against Gura’s. "I love you. Truly."

Gura froze for a heartbeat, his arms tightening to pull Riva flush against his heart, shielding him from the rest of the world. He leaned down, his kiss tasting of salt and absolute devotion.

"I’ve got you, Riva," Gura whispered against his lips, his voice thick with emotion. "I love you. Always."

As the 4:31 PM light of this January Monday faded into the grey of the Michigan afternoon, the two villains remained in their private, steaming world. They weren't generals or predators; they were simply two souls, finally and completely home in the warmth of each other’s arms.